W. P. Killpack

# LECTURES ON POETRY,

*&c.*

LONDON:
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# LECTURES

ON

# POETRY

AND

# GENERAL LITERATURE,

DELIVERED AT

THE ROYAL INSTITUTION

IN 1830 AND 1831.

BY

JAMES MONTGOMERY,

AUTHOR OF

"THE WORLD BEFORE THE FLOOD," "THE PELICAN ISLAND,"

&c. &c.

---

Poesy! thou sweet'st content
That e'er heaven to mortals lent,
Though thou be to them a scorn,
Who to nought but earth are born,
May my life no longer be
Than I am in love with thee!

GEORGE WITHER, *in Prison.*

---

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR

LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMAN,

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1833.

TO

HIS GRACE

**THE DUKE OF SOMERSET,**

PRESIDENT,

AND TO

THE MANAGERS

OF

THE ROYAL INSTITUTION OF GREAT BRITAIN,

THESE ESSAYS

ARE,

BY PERMISSION,

MOST RESPECTFULLY AND GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THEIR MUCH OBLIGED AND HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.



2018095

# PREFACE.

HAVING ventured to lay these papers before the Public, the Author dare not go further, in explanation or apology, than to express a hope that, whatever imperfections may be found in them, the candid reader will be more inclined to approve than condemn what he cannot but perceive has been done in good faith, and in honour of a noble art, which its advocate may have

"loved, not wisely, but too well."

That art he pretends not to teach, but merely to illustrate according to his views of its worth and influence.

Claiming the right of an Author to borrow from himself, he has adopted a few brief passages, with necessary alterations, from the Introductory Essays to the *Christian Psalmist* and the *Christian Poet*, compiled by him for MR. COLLINS, of Glasgow. A few larger sections, but entirely new modelled, have been

taken from critical articles furnished by him to a respectable Review, between the years 1806 and 1815. The "Retrospect of Literature," and the "View of Modern English Literature," were printed in the first volume of *The Metropolitan*, edited by MR. CAMPBELL, after they had been delivered at the ROYAL INSTITUTION.

To the noble President, and the honourable Managers of that Institution, as well as to the liberal-minded Audiences before whom the whole series was delivered, it is but justice to add, distinctly, that they are in no wise responsible for any thing in these Lectures which was unworthy to be repeated before them. The Author would disdain to shelter himself under their sanction from any censure which honest criticism can inflict upon him, in cases where he may have abused their confidence. The Lectures have been anxiously revised, especially those parts which the limited time allowed for delivery required to be omitted on the spot, but which appeared to be more necessary for their intelligence when submitted to cool perusal, than when uttered before indulgent hearers with the living voice.

Sheffield, April 24. 1833.

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# LECTURES ON POETRY.

## N° I.

### THE PRE-EMINENCE OF POETRY AMONG THE FINE ARTS.

*Apologue.*

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY begins his *Defence of Poesie* in the following manner: — "When the right virtuous E. W. and I were at the emperor's court together, we gave ourselves to learn horsemanship of *Gio. Pietro Pugliano* — one that, with great commendation, had the place of an esquire in his stable; and he, according to the fertileness of the Italian wit, did not only afford us the demonstration of his practice, but sought to enrich our minds with the contemplation therein, which he thought was most precious. But with none, I remember, mine ears were at any time more loaden, than when (angered with our slow payment, or moved with our learner-like admiration) he exercised his speech in praise of

his faculty. He said, soldiers were the noblest of mankind, and horsemen were the noblest soldiers. He said, they were the masters of war, and the ornaments of peace; speedy goers, and strong abiders; triumphers both in camps and courts: nay, to so unbelieved a point he proceeded, as that no earthly thing bred so much wonder to a prince as to be a good horseman; skill in government was but *pedanteria* in comparison. Then would he add certain praises, by telling what a peerless beast the horse was; the only serviceable courtier without flattery: the beast of most beauty, faithfulness, courage, and such more, that, if I had not been a piece of a logician before I came to him, I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse. But thus much, with his no few words, he drove into me, — that self-love is better than any gilding to make *that* seem gorgeous wherein ourselves are parties. Wherein, if *Pugliano*'s strong affection and weak arguments will not satisfy you, I will give you a nearer example of myself, who (I know not by what mischance, in these my not old years and idlest times,) having slipt into the title of a poet, am provoked to say something unto you, in defence of that my un-elected vocation; which if I handle with more good-will than good reasons, bear with me, since the scholar is to be pardoned that followeth in the steps of his master."

Thus far Sir Philip Sidney.

Without assuming or disclaiming any personal application of the foregoing apologue, the writer of the following strictures believes that he could not

more fitly have introduced them to the liberal and enlightened auditory before whom he is permitted to read them; who will thus be prepared both to expect, and, he trusts, to pardon, no small measure of extravagance in them.

## *The General Claims of Poetry to Pre-eminence.*

Poetry is the eldest, the rarest, and the most excellent of the fine arts. It was the first fixed form of language; the earliest perpetuation of thought: it existed before prose in history, before music in melody, before painting in description, and before sculpture in imagery. Anterior to the discovery of letters, it was employed to communicate the lessons of wisdom, to celebrate the achievements of valour, and to promulgate the sanctions of law. Music was invented to accompany, and painting and sculpture to illustrate it.

I have ventured to say that poetry is the rarest of the fine arts; and in proof, I need only appeal to the literature of our own country, in which will be found the remains of more than five hundred writers of verse, renowned in their generation, of whom there are not fifty whose compositions rise to the dignity of true poetry; and of these there are scarcely ten who are familiarly known by their works at this day. The art of constructing easy, elegant, and even spirited verse, may be acquired by any mind of moderate capacity, and enriched with liberal knowledge; and those who cultivate this talent may occa-

sionally hit upon some happy theme, and handle it with such unaccustomed delicacy or force, that for a while they outdo themselves, and produce that which adds to the public stock of permanent poetry. But habitually to frame the lay that quickens the pulse, flushes the cheek, warms the heart, and expands the soul of the hearer, — playing upon his passions as upon a lyre, and making him to feel as though he were holding converse with a spirit; this is the art of Nature herself, invariably and perpetually pleasing, by a secret and undefinable charm, which lives through all her works, and causes the very stones, as well as the stars, to cry out —

"The hand that made us is divine."

The power of being a poet in this sense, is a power from Heaven; wherein it consists, I know not; but this I do know, that there never existed a poet of the highest order, who either learned his art of one, or taught it to another. It is true that the poet communicates to the bosom of his reader the flame which burns in his own; but the bosom thus enkindled cannot communicate the fire to a third. In the breast of the bard alone, that energy of thought which gives birth to poetry is an active principle; in all others it is only a passive sentiment. That alone is true poetry, which makes the reader himself a poet for the time while he is under its excitement; which, indeed, constrains him to feel, to see, to think — almost to be what the poet felt, saw, thought, and was, while he was conceiving and composing his work. And this theory is confirmed by the fact,

that though original genius is wonderfully aided in its developement and display by learning and refinement, yet among the rudest people it has been found, like native gold and unwrought diamond, as pure and perfect in essence, though encrusted with baser matter, as among the most enlightened nations. With the first, however, it is seldomer seen, not being laboriously dug from the mine, purified in the furnace, or polished on the wheel, but only occasionally washed from the mountains, or accidentally discovered among the sands.

It is a remarkable coincidence, that, with the exception of ancient Rome, the noblest productions of the Muses have appeared in the middle ages, between gross barbarism and voluptuous refinement, when the human mind yet possessed strong traits of its primeval grandeur and simplicity; but divested of its former ferociousness, and chastened by courteous manners, felt itself rising in knowledge, virtue, and intellectual superiority. The poems of Homer existed long before Greece arrived at its zenith of glory, or even of highly advanced civilisation. Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto, in Italy; Ercilla in Spain; Camoens in Portugal; as well as our own Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton; flourished in periods far inferior to the present in wealth, luxury, general intelligence, and literary taste; yet in their respective countries their great poems have not since been equalled, nor is it probable that they will hereafter be surpassed by any of their successors.

To the peculiar good fortune which, in their respective countries, and independent of their abstract

merits, has secured imperishable pre-eminence to a few early and great names, more particular allusion will be made in another place.

Poetry is not only the earliest and rarest, but also the most excellent of the fine arts. It transcends all other literary composition in harmony, beauty, and splendour of style, thought, and imagery, as well as in the vivacity and permanency of its impressions on the mind; for its language and sentiments are so intimately connected, that they are remembered together; they are soul and body, which cannot be separated without death, — a death, in which the dissolution of the one causes the disappearance of the other; if the spell of the words be broken, the charm of the idea is lost. Thus nothing can be less adorned than the opening of "Paradise Lost;" the cadence of the verse alone redeems the whole from being plain prose in the first six lines; but thenceforward it rises through every clause in energy and grandeur, till the reader feels himself carried away by the impetuosity of that

> "adventurous song,
> That with no middle flight intends to soar
> Above the Aconian mount:"

and experiences full proof of the poet's power to accomplish his purpose, so magnificently set forth in the crowning lines of the clause: —

> "That to the height of this great argument,
> I may assert eternal providence,
> And justify the ways of God to man."

Now, let any man attempt to tell to another the subject of Milton's exordium. This he might do very correctly, and in very apt words; yet his prose interpretation would be no more to Milton's stately numbers, than the argument *at the head* of the first book is to the discussion of that argument *in* the poem itself.

### *Poetry and Music.*

Poetry transcends music in the passion, pathos, and meaning of its movements; for its harmonies are ever united with distinct feelings and emotions of the rational soul; their associations are always clear and easily comprehensible: whereas music, when it is not allied to language, or does not appeal to memory, is simply a sensual and vague, though an innocent and highly exhilarating delight, conveying no direct improvement to the heart, and leaving little permanent impression upon the mind. When, indeed, music awakens national, military, local, or tender recollections of the distant or the dead, the loved or the lost, it then performs the highest office of poetry, — it *is* poetry, as Echo in the golden mythology of Greece remained a nymph, even after she had passed away into a sound. But the first music must have been vocal, and the first words sung to notes must have been metrical. "Blest pair of Syrens, Voice and Verse!" exclaims the greatest of our poets, (himself a musician, and never more a poet than when he chants the praises of the sister art, as he does in a hundred passages,)—

> " Blest pair of Syrens, Voice and Verse!
> Wed your divine sounds," &c.

So sang Milton. Instrumental accompaniments were afterwards invented to aid the influence of both; and when all three are combined in solemn league and covenant, nothing earthly so effectually presents to our " high-raised phantasy,"

> " That undisturbed song of pure consent,
> Aye sung around the sapphire-colour'd throne,
> To Him that sits thereon: * * * *
> Where the bright seraphim, in burning row,
> Their loud, uplifted angel-trumpets blow;
> And the cherubic hosts, in thousand quires,
> Touch their celestial harps of golden wires."

But there is a limit beyond which poetry and music cannot go together; and it is remarkable, that from the point where they separate, poetry assumes a higher and more commanding, as well as versatile, character; while music becomes more complex, curious, and altogether artificial, incapable (except as an accompaniment to dancing) of being understood or appreciated by any except professors and amateurs. In this department, though very imperfectly intellectual or imaginative, to compose it requires great power of intellect, and great splendour, fertility, and promptitude of imagination. Handel, Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart, as inventors of imperishable strains, both vocal and instrumental, may be not unworthily ranked with the first order of poets. To be an accomplished performer, however, though it requires talent and tact of a peculiar kind, no

more implies the genius to compose music, than to be a consummate actor implies the ability to write tragedies. The mental exercise in each case is essentially as different as invention and imitation are. A skilful violinist may lead the oratorio of the Messiah as Handel himself could not have led it: Kemble could not have written the part of Hamlet, nor could Shakspeare have performed it as Kemble did.

It may be observed here, that the musical and the poetical ear are entirely distinct. Many musicians have disagreeably bad voices in conversation, and chatter in jig-time, or talk in *staccato* tones, unendurable to one who has a fine sense of the melody of speech. On the other hand, poets and declaimers have frequently had no ear at all for music. Pope had none; Garrick had none; yet in harmonious rhythmical composition, the poet to this hour is unexcelled: nor was the actor less perfect in managing the cadences and intonations of a voice "as musical as is Apollo's lute," in the delivery of the most familiar, impassioned, or heroic speeches which the whole range of the British drama imposed, from King Lear to Abel Drugger.

It is a common complaint with ordinary composers, that poets do not write verses suitable for music. Though there is some truth in the statement, as refers to poets of the same class as such composers themselves are, yet it is the express business of those who set poetry at all, to adapt their notes to the pitch of it, whereby their own melodies will be proportionately exalted; not to require that the poet's lay should be brought down to their standard of adapt-

ation, and the nobler art be degraded by condescending to the inferior. That the most exquisite strains of English verse may be fitted to strains of music worthy of them, we have examples abundant in the present day, from the songs of Robert Burns to the melodies of Thomas Moore. Yet something must be conceded occasionally on the part of the poets, though no more than may, at the same time, improve their lines as verse, while it renders them more obedient subjects for music. Dryden, in the preface to one of his operas, gives vent to his impatience at being necessitated to make his noble but reluctant numbers submit to be drilled and disciplined to the tactics of a French composer. After enumerating some of his miserable shifts, he says, — " It is true, I have not often been put to this drudgery; but where I have, the words will sufficiently show, that I was then a slave to the composition, *which I will never be again*. It is my part to invent, and the musician's to humour that invention. I may be counselled, and will always follow my friend's advice where I find it reasonable, but I will never part with the power of the *militia*." —*Introduction to Albion and Albanus.*

### *Poetry and Painting.*

Poetry is superior to painting; for poetry is progressive, painting stationary, in its capabilities of description. Poetry elevates the soul through every gradation of thought and feeling, producing its greatest effects at the last. Painting begins precisely where poetry breaks off, — with the climax of the

subject,—and lets down the mind from the catastrophe through the details of the story, imperceptibly soothing it from sublime astonishment into tranquil approbation. Painting is limited to a movement of time and an eye-glance of space; but it must be confessed that it can make that moment last for ages, and render that eye-glance illustrious as the sun. Poetry is restrained neither to time nor place; resembling the sun himself, it may shine successively all round the globe, and endure till "the earth and the works therein shall be burnt up."

Painting exhibits its whole purpose at one view, but with a generality of character, which requires previous acquaintance with that purpose before the spectator can judge whether it has been effected; we must know all that was intended to be done, before we can comprehend what has actually been done. Then, indeed, if the aim has been successfully accomplished, the glory of the artist is consummated at once; and while the enthusiasm of admiration settles down into calm delight, or spreads itself in patient and interested examination of particulars, the mind goes back through all the difficulties which have been overcome in the management and conduct of the performance as a work of art, and all the circumstances which must have concurred to bring the story, if the subject be narrative, the scenery if it be landscape, or the person if it be portrait, to that special crisis, light, or aspect, which has enabled the inventor to exhibit the sum of his ideas so felicitously, as to imply the various antecedent, accompanying, and conventional incidents,

which are necessary to be understood before the beholder can perfectly gather from the forms and colours before his eye, the fine fancies, deep feelings, and glorious combinations of external objects, which pre-existed in the artist's mind; and out of a thousand of which he has produced one, partaking of all and concentrating their excellencies, like the Venus of Apelles, to which the beauties of Greece lent their loveliness, and were abundantly repaid by having that part in her which she borrowed from them. Perhaps in portrait alone can painting claim the advantage of poetry; because there the pencil perpetuates the very features, air, and personal appearance of the individual represented; and when that individual is one of eminence, — a hero, a patriot, a poet, an orator, — it is the vehicle of the highest pleasure which the art can communicate; and in this respect portrait painting (however disparaged) is the highest point of the art itself, — being at once the most real, intellectual, and imaginative.

A poem is a campaign, in which all the marches, sufferings, toils, and conflicts of the hero are successively developed, to final victory. A painting is the triumph after victory, when the conqueror, the captives, the spoils, and the trophies, are displayed in one pageant of magnificence, — implying, undoubtedly, all the means, the labour, and diversities of fortune by which the achievement was attended; but without manifesting them to the uninformed by-standers. Without previous knowledge, therefore, of the subject, the figures in the most perfect historical group are nameless; the business in which

they are engaged is obscure; while often the country, the age, and even the class of life, to which they belonged, can be only imperfectly guessed. Of consequence, little comparative interest will be excited. The child's question, "Is it true?" immediately occurs; and just in proportion as we ascertain the facts, the person, the whole story, we are charmed, affected, or surprised by the power of the master. Without *the book* the wand of the enchanter cannot work the spell.

Landscape painting is that which is most easily understood at first sight; because the objects of which it is composed are as familiar to our eyes, as the words in which they could be explained are to our ears, so that we recognise them at once, and can judge without commentary of the grouping and perspective. But the pleasure in contemplating the most exquisite productions of Claude Lorraine, Gaspar Poussin, and other great masters, is exceedingly enhanced by consideration of the skill of the artists in creating, what never, indeed, for one moment becomes an illusion, but that which enables the mind within itself to form an ideal prototype, worthy of the pictured representation. Even when we know that the scenes are from nature, admiration of the pencil that drew them is the highest ingredient of our delight in beholding them, — unless, by local, historical, or personal associations, the trees, the streams, the hills, or the buildings, remind us of things greater and dearer than themselves. This, of course, is the most exalted gratification which landscape painting can confer; yet poetry, which, in

distinct delineations of natural objects, is otherwise inferior, has decided pre-eminence here.

The following stanzas from, probably a hasty, but certainly a happy effusion of Thomas Campbell's, in the dew and blossom of his youthful poetry, will exemplify this fact. They refer to a morning walk, in company with a Russian lady, to a place called "the Fountain of the Thorn," on an eminence near Vienna, commanding a view of the city, the Danube, and the neighbouring country to a vast extent: *—

"Ah! how long shall I delight
In the memory of that morn,
When we climb'd the Danube's height
To the Fountain of the Thorn!

"And beheld his waves and islands,
Flashing, glittering in the sun,
From Vienna's gorgeous towers
To the mountains of the Hun.

"There was gladness in the sky,
There was verdure all around;
And, where'er it turn'd — the eye
Look'd on rich historic ground.

"Over Aspern's field of glory,
Noontide's distant haze was cast,
And the hills of Turkish story
Teem'd with visions of the past."

* The introductory and concluding verses, being merely complimentary, are omitted. The poem itself first appeared in this country in the "Family Magazine of November, 1830," edited by Mr. Shoberl, who acknowledges that he copied them from a German periodical published at Vienna. They were probably written about the year 1802.

What could a painter do with this? Assuredly he might produce a landscape as superb as ever emanated, in colours of this world, from the pencils of Titian or Rubens. All the elements are at hand. A bird's-eye prospect from a height overlooking a majestic river, studded with islands, "flashing, glittering in the sun;" the "gorgeous towers" of an imperial city; the verdure of woods on every side; over all, a brilliant sky; and far away beneath the haze of summer-noon, long lines of undulated hills, lessening, lightening, vanishing from the view. The canvass might be covered with all these, yet, though they might dazzle the eye, and enchant the imagination, like a glimpse into fairy-land, — unexplained, they would be mere abstractions, and the picture would be valued solely as a work of art; but let a label be attached with the word *Vienna* upon it, then, indeed, a new and nobler interest would be felt in the whole, and curiosity to find out every part, when we knew that a real city, stream, and landscape were depicted. This, however, would be the extent to which the painter could transport the eye and the mind of his admirer.

Here, then, begins the triumph of poetry, which, while it can adorn, more or less perfectly, all the subjects of painting drawn from visible nature, has the whole invisible world to itself, — thoughts, feelings, imaginations, affections, all that memory can preserve of things past, and all that prescience can conceive or forebode of things to come. These it can express, minutely or comprehensively, in mass or in detail, foreshortened or progressive, line by line, shade by shade, till it completely possesses the reader,

and puts him as completely in possession of all that is most nearly or remotely associated with the theme in discussion. In the instance before us, the poet does this with the fewest possible phrases; and yet with such brilliance and force of allusion, that the reader has only to follow, in any direction, the retrospective avenues opened on every hand.

After shedding the glory of sunshine on the "waves and islands" of the river, the green luxuriance of the champaign, and the "gorgeous towers" of the metropolis,—in three words, he lets in the daylight of past ages upon the scene. His "rich, historic ground," calls up the actions and actors of the mightiest events ever exhibited on that theatre; —the mountains of the Hun, the field of Aspern, the hills of Turkish story, are crowded with armies, flouted with banners, and shaken with the tramp of chivalry, and the march of phalanxed legions. They all "teem with visions of the past." Those who are acquainted with the circumstances of the siege of Vienna by the Turks, about the middle of the seventeenth century, and its deliverance by Sobiesky, king of Poland, will at once realise the Ottoman battle-array under the beleaguered walls; the despair within the city, where all hope but in heaven was cut off, and the churches were thronged with praying multitudes; the sudden appearance of the Poles, and their attack upon the infidels: the rage of conflict, man to man, horse to horse, swords against cimeters, cimeters against swords, one moment "flashing, glittering in the sun," the next crimsoned and reeking with blood; the shouts, the groans, the agonies, the transports of the strife; till the bar-

barians, borne down by the irresistible impetuosity of their Christian assailants, fell heaps upon heaps, on "the field of glory," or fled "to the mountains of the Hun," while Danube, from "the Fountain of the Thorn," rolled purple to the deep, bearing along with his overcharged current the turbaned corpses of the invaders back into the bowels of their own land. That disastrous siege and triumphant rescue were celebrated by a contemporary poet (*Filicaja*) in three of the sublimest odes which Italy can boast; and which (with the exceptionof the *Hohenlinden* and the *Battle of the Baltic*, by our accomplished countryman whose stanzas I have been discussing), stand unrivalled by any war-songs with which I am acquainted, whether among the few fragments of antiquity, or in the whole armoury of later ages.

### *Poetry and Sculpture.*

Sculpture is the noblest, but the most limited of the manual fine arts; it produces the fewest, but the greatest effects; it approaches nearest to nature, and yet can present little beside models of her living forms, and those principally in repose. Plausible reasons are assigned for the latter spontaneous restriction of their art, with which practitioners in general are satisfied, from the extreme difficulty, and with most of them the absolute impossibility, of expressing lively action or vehement passion, otherwise than in their beginnings and their results. This is not the place to discuss the question; yet I know not how it can be doubted, that sculpture might

legitimately essay, and victoriously achieve, the most daring innovations in this almost forbidden field, into which few beside Michael Angelo and Roubilliac, among the moderns, have set a foot, without trembling hesitation or ignorant presumption, either of which must have ensured miscarriage. The Laocoön and the friezes of the Parthenon are trophies of ancient prowess in this perilous department, which, instead of being the despair, ought to be the assurance of hope to adventurers in a later age and colder clime, among a people more phlegmatic than the gay Greeks or the spirited Italians. When a new Pygmalion shall arise, he will not be content to say to his statue, with the last stroke of the chisel, "*Speak*," but he will add "*Move*."

Be this as it may, — beauty, intelligence, strength, grace of attitude, symmetry of limb, harmonious grouping, simple, severe, sublime expression, the soul informing the marble, the personal character stamped upon the features, — these are the highest attempts of the highest minds, in the highest of the imitative arts. It follows, that mediocrity is less tolerable in sculpture than in painting, music, and even poetry itself. Nothing in it is truly excellent, but that which is pre-eminently so; because nothing less than the most successful strokes of the happiest chisel can powerfully effect the spectator, fix him in dumb astonishment, touch his heart-strings with tender emotion, or stir thought from its depths into ardent and earnest exercise. I appeal to all who hear me, whether, among a hundred of the monuments in our cathedrals, and the statues in our

public places, they ever met with more than one or two that laid hold of their imagination, so as to haunt it both in retirement and in society, — or, most unexpectedly to

> flash upon that inward eye,
> Which is the bliss of solitude;
>
> WORDSWORTH.

for even in crowds, in business, in dissipation, what has intensely appealed to our sympathy on first acquaintance, will often recur in the image-chamber of the mind. Thus, after the first hearing, will certain strains of music; thus, after the first sight, some masterpiece of painting; and frequently, far more frequently than either of these, after the first reading, will lines, and phrases, and sentiments of poetry, ring in the memory, and play with the affections: but rarely indeed in sculpture does the image presented to the eye become *a statue of thought* in the mind. This may be principally owing to the paucity of subjects (I mean as the art is now practised), and, to an uninitiated eye at least, the similarity of treatment by ordinary adepts, whether single figures or monumental groups. When, however, (to use a strong metaphor) at the touch of some Promethean hand, a statue steps out of this enchanted circle, and looks as though it had grown out of the marble in the course of nature, without the aid of hands; then indeed does the artist enrich the beholder with one of the rarest treasures that genius can bequeath to contemporaries or posterity; and for which the willing yet exacted homage of applause will never cease to be paid,

while his work endures. Such are the Apollo Belvidere, the Venus de' Medici, and other inestimable relics of antiquity; such the Moses and David of Michael Angelo; and such (to give an English example worthy to be named with these; judging solely by the power which it exercises over the purest and most universal of human sympathies, — sympathies which can no more be bribed by artifice than they can help yielding to the impulse of nature)—such, I say, is the simple memorial, by our own Chantrey, in Lichfield Cathedral, of two children, that were "lovely in their lives, and in death are undivided." Of these specimens, it may be affirmed, that they have shown how the narrow bounds of vulgar precedent may be left as far behind, as a star in the heavens leaves a meteor in the air. Of the antiques alone, how innumerable has been the progeny generated from creative minds, following them less by imitation than by rivalry, and borrowing nothing from them but elemental principles; with this grand advantage, which can less strictly be said to belong to models in any other polite art, namely, that what could be *done*, but *not* surpassed, had been shown; leaving not a mere ideal excellence to be attained, but the perfect example of all that the eye could desire, the imagination conceive, or the hand execute.

Now, poetry is a school of sculpture, in which the art flourishes, not in marble or brass, but in that which outlasts both,— in letters, which the fingers of a child may write or blot, but which, once written, Time himself may not be able to obliterate; and in

sounds, which are but passing breath, yet being once uttered, by possibility, may never cease to be repeated. Sculpture to the eye, in palpable materials, is of necessity confined to a few forms, aspects, and attitudes. The poet's images are living, breathing, moving creatures; they stand, walk, run, fly, speak, love, fight, fall, labour, suffer, die, — in a word, they are men of like passions with ourselves, undergoing all the changes of actual existence, and presenting to the mind of the reader, solitary figures, or complicated groups, more easily retained (for words are better recollected than shapen substances), and infinitely more diversified, than the chisel could hew out of all the rocks under the sun. Nor is this a fanciful or metaphorical illustration of the pre-eminence which I claim for the art I am advocating. In proof of it, I appeal at once to the works of the eldest and greatest poets of every country. In Homer, Dante, and Chaucer, for example, it is exceedingly curious to remark with what scrupulous care and minuteness personal appearance, stature, bulk, complexion, age, and other incidents, are exhibited, for the purpose of giving life and reality to the scenes and actions in which their characters are engaged. All these are bodied forth to the eye through the mind, as sculpture addresses the mind through the eye.

In sculpture, nothing is less impressive than the allegorical personages that haunt cenotaphs, and crowd cathedral walls; for, however admirably wrought, they awaken not the slightest emotion, whether they weep, or rage, or frown, or smile. In poetry, likewise, as may be shown hereafter, ex-

panded allegories are the least effective of all the means by which terror, wonder, pity, delight, or anger, are attempted to be excited; yet with single figures frequently, and with small groups occasionally, under the guise of metaphors and similes, poetry of every kind is peopled more splendidly, beautifully, and awfully, than was the Grecian Olympus with gods and heroes, the ocean with nymphs and nereids, and Tartarus with furies, spectres, and inexorable judges. Two or three brief specimens may decide the superiority of verse in this field of competition. How could the image of *Fear*, which "to and fro did fly," be realised in marble as it has been by Spenser in rhyme? Collins's odes are galleries of poetical statuary, which no art could give to the sight, though perfectly made out in the sensorium of the brain.

> "Danger, whose limbs of giant mould,
> What mortal eye could fix'd behold?
> Who stalks his round, a hideous form,
> Howling amidst the midnight storm,
> Or throws him on the ridgy steep
> Of some loose, hanging rock to sleep."

What sculptor's hand could arrest this monster, and place him in *one* attitude, which should suggest *all* the ideas expressed in these wonderful lines? — his "limbs of giant-mould," — his stalking, howling, casting himself prone, and falling asleep; — with the accompaniments of the "midnight storm," "the ridgy steep," "the loose, hanging rock;" and, above all (perhaps), the mortal "eye" vainly attempting to

*fix* itself upon his "hideous form?"* In the sequel of the same ode we meet with —

——" the ravening brood of Fate,
That *lap* the blood of Sorrow."

The artist might fearfully represent wolves or wild dogs lapping the blood of a slain victim; but it would require the commentary of the passage itself to make the spectator understand, that by the former were meant "the ravening brood of Fate," that follow in the rear of "Vengeance," — "the fiends," that, near allied to "Danger" afore-mentioned, "o'er Nature's wounds and wrecks preside;" and that their prey was the personification of "Sorrow." Yet the poet, in the context, does all this as tri-

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* Chaucer's description of "*Danger*" in the *Romaunt of the Rose*, is exceedingly spirited, and equally characteristic with that of Collins, though very different, because the fiend is differently exercising himself: — Collins presents natural dangers from lightning, tempest, and earthquake, —Chaucer, the perils of war, battle, human violence, or ambush; the last of which is finely conceived in the first couplet: —

" With that anon upstart *Dangere*
Out of the place where he was hidde;
His malice in his chere was kidde; (*a*)
Full great he was, and blacke of hewe,
Sturdy and hideous, whoso him knewe;
Like sharpe urchins his heere was grow,
His eyés red, sparcling as glow;
His nose frouncid full kirked stoode, (*b*)
He come criande as he were woode." (*c*)

(*a*) Was seen in his look. (*b*) Crooked and upturned stood.
(*c*) Mad.

umphantly as though he could give bodily sight to the mental eye, by which they are discerned through the magic medium of his verse.

Let us bring — not into gladiatorial conflict, but into honourable competition, where neither can suffer disparagement — one of the masterpieces of ancient sculpture, and two stanzas from "Childe Harold," in which that very statue is turned into verse, which seems almost to make it visible: —

THE DYING GLADIATOR.

"I see before me the Gladiator lie;
He leans upon his hand; his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony;
And his droop'd head sinks gradually low;
And through his side, the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one,
Like the first of a thunder-shower; — and now
The arena swims around him, — he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout that hail'd the wretch
who won."

Now, all this, sculpture has embodied in perpetual marble, and every association touched upon in the description might spring up in a well instructed mind, while contemplating the insulated figure which personifies the expiring champion. Painting might take up the same subject, and represent the amphitheatre thronged to the height with ferocious faces, all bent upon the exulting conqueror and his prostrate antagonist — a thousand for one of them sympathising rather with the transport of the former than the agony of the latter. Here, then, sculpture and painting have reached their climax; neither of

them can give the actual thoughts of the personages whom they exhibit so palpably to the outward sense, that the character of those thoughts cannot be mistaken. Poetry goes farther than both; and when one of the sisters had laid down her chisel, the other her pencil, she continues her strain; wherein, having already sung what each have pictured, she thus reveals that secret of the sufferer's breaking heart, which neither of them could intimate by any visible sign. But we must return to the swoon of the dying man: —

" The arena swims around him, — he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout that hail'd the wretch who won.

" He *heard it*, and he *heeded not*, — his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away;
He reck'd not of the life he lost, nor prize,
— But, where his rude hut by the Danube lay,
There were his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother: — he, their sire,
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday;
All this gush'd with his blood." * * *

Myriads of eyes had gazed upon that statue; through myriads of minds all the images and ideas connected with the combat and the fall, the spectators and the scene, had passed in the presence of that unconscious marble which has given immortality to the pangs of death; but not a soul among all the beholders through eighteen centuries, — not one had ever before thought of "the rude hut," the "Dacian mother," the "young barbarians." At length came the poet of passion; and looking down upon

"The dying Gladiator" (less as what it was than what it represented), turned the marble into man, and endowed it with human affections; then, away over the Apennines and over the Alps, away, on the wings of irrepressible sympathy, flew his spirit to the banks of the Danube, where, "with his heart," were the "eyes" of the victim, under the night-fall of death; for "there were his young barbarians all at play, and there their Dacian mother." This is nature; this is truth. While the conflict continued, the combatant thought of himself only; he aimed at nothing but victory; — when life and this were lost, his last thoughts, his sole thoughts, would turn to his wife and his little children.

In none of the foregoing remarks has the smallest slight been aimed at Music, Painting, or Sculpture, by giving the palm to Poetry; in fact it has been intended to exalt them, that, by showing the elder of the four sisters to be the intellectual superior of the younger three (illustrious and unsurpassed as each is in her own department), she herself might be crowned with the greater glory. On the subject of their generous rivalry let it be observed, that it is intellectual pre-eminence alone which is here claimed for poetry. The measure of original genius required for excelling in the one or the other, I leave undetermined.

## *The Comparative Rewards of Professors of the Fine Arts.*

Having thus endeavoured to prove, by no invidious comparisons, that poetry is the eldest, the rarest, and the most excellent of the fine arts, I may here touch upon another peculiarity not yet alluded to, being an extrinsic one, — in which each of the others bears away from her a prize "for which they all contend," though only of secondary, not to say sordid, value. Though the gift of poetry be the most beneficial to the world, it is the least profitable to the possessor. There has scarcely been a period, or a country, in which a poet could live by the fruits of his labours. This circumstance (in no respect dishonourable to the art) has been a snare by which multitudes of its professors have been tempted to dishonour both it and themselves, by courtly servility to royal and noble patrons; — by yet viler degradation in ministering to vulgar prejudices, and pandering to gross passions; — or, with the garbage of low satire, feasting envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, — monsters of malignity, whose daily food, like that of the king of Cambay, in Hudibras, is "asp, and basilisk, and toad." But this is not the place to dwell upon the miseries and the sins of unfortunate poets; with nothing but their proverbial poverty have we to deal at present.

It is acknowledged, that great honours and emoluments have been bestowed on some of the tribe. Pindar knew the value of his talents in gold, and he exacted it. Virgil and Horace flourished within the

precincts of a court; others of meaner note, in modern times, might be mentioned;—but, after all, munificent patronage is yet rarer than transcendent talents. In the age of Augustus there were many poets and but one Mæcenas; Augustus himself was not a second. It is well for poetry, and no worse for poets, in the main, that the age of patronage is past; that the Parnassian slave-trade is abolished;—would that we were able to add, that Parnassian slavery itself was done away,—that spontaneous bondage of poets themselves to folly, and vice, and pernicious fashion, for the hire of unrighteousness! With little to expect from the great, to the public the successful poet may look for his moderate but not inglorious reward.

It has been facetiously said, that booksellers drink their wine out of the skulls of authors; and it has been declared, by one of the most illustrious of our country's writers,—himself a poet,—who had proved all the pangs of heart-sickness from hope deferred, and hope disappointed, which he has so admirably expressed in a couplet of sterling English, excelling even the celebrated original in the third satire of Juvenal:—

> "Haud facile emergunt, quorum virtutibus obstat
> Res angusta domi."
>
> "This mournful truth is every where confess'd,
> Slow rises worth by poverty depress'd."
>
> *Vanity of Human Wishes.*

To return,—it has been declared by Dr. Johnson, that booksellers are the best patrons. Both sayings may be equally true, though neither of them is

strictly so. It is as purely figurative to call a bookseller an author's patron as to say that he drinks his wine out of an author's skull. In reality—nay, it cannot in the common course of things be otherwise—just in proportion as a writer's lucubrations bring profit to his bookseller, the bookseller will be liberal in remunerating his talents,—for the strongest reason in the world,—to secure his own interest. That the market-price of the greatest works of literature, of poetry in particular, should be very incommensurate to the toil, the time, and the expense of thought required to perfect them, is a circumstance rather to be lamented than complained of, and rather to be endured with patience than lamented. The evil, if it be an evil, is irremediable; and however it may be alleviated by the multiplication of readers, and the taste for elegant and magnificent books,—though the latter factitious taste is nearly obsolete, and volumes of compendious literature are now the rage,—yet must authors be for ever excluded from the hope of reaping equal pecuniary benefit from the offspring of their minds with first-rate professors of the sister arts. The world, which loves to wonder, wonders less at Madame Catalani receiving a prince's ransom for a few pulsations of breath,—by which she can throw a whole theatre into ecstasy; or the late Benjamin West hesitating to accept ten thousand pounds for a single picture,—than that Sir Walter Scott should have been paid five hundred for the Lay of the Last Minstrel, and from one to two, from two to three, and from three to four thousand pounds for so many

other ballad-like romances in succession;—prices unprecedented in poetical finance, and not likely to be given again till another Sir Walter shall arise to witch the world with noble penmanship.*

I will never degrade poetry so low as to admit, even for argument's sake, that the force of genius displayed in any of the five compositions alluded to is no greater than Catalani or West were required to put forth to obtain proportionate remuneration. It would be making sounds and colours equal to thoughts and feelings to allow this. For myself, I would rather have written "the last words of Marmion" for love (as the saying is), than have pocketed all the coin that has been poured out upon shop-compters, at box-lobby doors, and in concert-rooms, for setting, singing, playing, and selling them, from Berwick-on-Tweed to Penzance. Nor is this vain boasting; for to have written those few lines, I must have been possessed of the power of him who did write them; and then I could have envied no man the profit which he might professionally acquire from my labours. It is enough to make a poor poet burst his spleen, to read the memoirs of eminent musicians and painters, and contrast them with those of his more illustrious predecessors. While the former have been courted, enriched, and ennobled by pon-

* The circumstances respecting Mr. West and Sir Walter Scott are adopted from common report; but, however incorrect they may be, the impression made on the public mind, on the presumption of their truth, is sufficient for the author's argument here.

tiffs and potentates, the latter have languished in poverty, and died in despair. Will any man deny that the poems of Milton, as productions of genius, are equal to the pictures of Rubens? Yet the artist's pencil supported him in princely splendour; — the poet's muse could not procure, what even his enemies would have furnished to him, gratuitously, in a dungeon, bread and water. Poets might be permitted to say, that music, painting, and sculpture *may be* appreciated in this world, and recompensed by the things of it, but poetry *cannot*; its price is above wealth, and its honours are those which sovereigns cannot confer. But they are generally posthumous. Like Egyptian kings, however praised while living, it is on the issue of their trials after death that the most exalted have pyramids decreed to them; and it is then that even the most admired and feared may be condemned to obloquy, and abandoned to oblivion.

### *Poetry compared with Eloquence, History, and Philosophy.*

In reference to other species of literature, it is not my purpose to present them in any lengthened, much less any disparaging, contrast with poetry. Eloquence, history, philosophy, must consider poetry as their sister by blood (not merely by alliance, as in the case of music, painting, and sculpture,) rather than their rival, — elder, indeed, than all, yet in perpetual youth; the nurse of each, yet more beautiful than either of them in her loveliest attire. The

most perfect models of eloquence may be found in the writings of the epic and dramatic poets; also the most authentic facts of history, embellished not beyond truth, but agreeable to truth; and the purest morals of philosophy, set forth with lights and shadows which transform them from pretended mysteries, and pompous truisms, into clear, permanent, and influential realities.*

The first of these assertions will probably be admitted,—that eloquence has frequently been presented to as great (if not greater) advantage, in verse as in prose; ancient oratory, in comparison with ancient poetry, has exercised small influence over the minds, manners, and characters of succeeding ages. Cicero, all perfect as he is, in his own unri-

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* Milton's splendid view of the intellectual glories of ancient Greece may be advantageously quoted here:—

"There shalt thou hear and learn the secret power
Of harmony, in tones and numbers hit
By voice or hand; and various-measured verse,
Æolian charms and Dorian lyric odes,
And his, who gave them breath, but higher sung,
Blind Melesigenes, thence Homer call'd,
Whose poem Phœbus challenged for his own:
Thence what the lofty, grave tragedians taught
In chorus or iambic, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight received
In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate, and chance, and change in human life,
High actions, and high passions best describing:
Thence to the famous orators repair,
Those ancient, whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will that fierce democratie,
Shook the arsenal, and fulmined over Greece
To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne."

*Paradise Regained*, book iv.

valled style of prose, as numerous as the richest verse, — and Demosthenes himself, — of the effects of whose speeches as "fulmined" from the living voice over the heads of audiences that could criticise every syllable, even when Philip was at the gates, — we must necessarily form very imperfect ideas from reading them in a dead language, addressed only to the eye, for the sounds, whatever be our pronunciation, are little more than imaginary; — Cicero and Demosthenes have exercised no such power over posterity as Homer and Virgil have done, though the diction of these lies under yet a heavier impracticability of modern utterance, from the loss of the true use of quantity, as well as articulation, in the antique tongues.

In history, as a matter of fact, whether creditable to the eccentricity of human taste or not, it will hardly be disputed, that Xenophon and Thucydides have failed to command the attention, which (not without a cause lying deep in our very nature) has been won by Anacreon and Horace. But even on its own ground, history, in some respects, as the transmitter of knowledge concerning the past, is compelled to vail to poetry. Not that the records of actual events can be so properly conveyed in verse (though bards in all nations were the first chroniclers) as they may be, through all their remembered details, in prose; but, since all memorials must be necessarily imperfect, and more or less mixed up with error, — by the latter we may be absolutely deceived, taking the statements for pure truth; while, by the former, we must be left proportionately in ignorance of some

things needful to be known, to form a correct judgment of great and complicated transactions. Now the defects and errors of poets concerning subjects of history are not in themselves liable to mislead, because the details are never exhibited as literal verities, but avowedly as things which might have happened under certain circumstances, in cases where what really did happen is no longer known. This is exemplified by the narrative poems of the Siege of Troy, and the Voyages of Ulysses and Æneas, — events of which no other history exists; and though few will doubt that for much of the romance in the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Æneid, there was no foundation in truth, nobody will mistake the palpable fictions for facts. In history, on the other hand, it is difficult, nay, impossible, to distinguish between facts and fictions, when both rest upon the same authority, and there happens to be nothing in the nature of things to enable us to separate the one from the other, both being in the abstract alike probable. But this would lead us into too wide a field of discussion, at present. It may, however, be safely assumed, that a large proportion of ancient history, especially that of the early periods, is as fabulous as the mythology of the gods, which usually precedes the traditions of the men that first made and then worshipped them.

Poetry, in one sense, builds up the ruins of history, fallen otherwise into irrecoverable dilapidation. From the epic, dramatic, satiric, didactic, and even from the lyric remains of the Greeks and Romans, we learn more than history, were it sevenfold more

perfect than it is in the records of great men and great deeds, could ever have communicated concerning the state of society in old times and in famous lands. From the former we derive almost all that we know of ancient manners, customs, arts, sciences, amusements, food, dress, and those numberless small circumstances which make up the business and leisure, the colour, form, and character of life. Poetry, in a word, shows us men, not only as kings and legislators, warriors and philosophers, tyrants and slaves, actors and sufferers upon the public stage,—but men in all their domestic relationships,—as they are in themselves, as they appear in their families, and as they influence their little neighbourhoods. Nay, even in the palace, the hall of justice, the field of battle, the academic grove, poetry exhibits man in *portraiture*,—more like himself *individually* (so as his fellows in all ages may personally sympathise with him), than history can show him in any of the artificial groups amidst which he appears in his assumed character,—a mask among masks.

Take poetry and history upon the same favourite ground,—war. Homer may not have recorded the actual events at the siege of Troy, and the disasters of Greece in consequence of the anger of Achilles; but, with all his noble exaggeration of the strength, speed, prowess, and other qualities of his heroes, the splendour of their arms, and the sumptuousness of their state, he has undoubtedly delineated from the life the people of his own and the age before him; so that we learn more concerning the warriors, minstrels, sages, ladies, and all classes of human society,

from the Iliad and the Odyssey alone, than from the most faithful, intelligent, and least romantic of the historians of the same and succeeding periods, before the fashions of those strange times were passed away. Poetry is thus the illuminator of history, the paths of which, in early times, would have been dark indeed, without this "light from heaven."

In regard to philosophy and jurisprudence, it may be remarked, that Pythagoras, Solon, Lycurgus, and Socrates himself, occasionally employed poetry to dictate laws, with oracular authority, and to enforce morals with the sanction of a language like that of the gods. Plato was the most poetical of writers in prose, because, it has been said, he could not excel Homer in verse, and at the head of one or the other species of literature he had determined to be; — thus acknowledging the pre-eminence of that which he did not adopt, by making that which he did approach as near to it as possible. It is true, that he would banish poets from his commonwealth; first, however, crowning them with bays. But there were immunities under his system of polity which rendered it no disgrace for the divinest of human arts to be forbidden; and in his other works he does honour to himself, by giving to it the honour due. I palliate not the abominations of pagan poetry, many of them too revolting to be named; but these were the perversions of what in itself is most excellent, and in proportion to its excellence most pernicious when perverted. But pagan poetry, with all its sins, has survived pagan philosophy with all its merits.

*Permanence of Poetry.*

Poetry, the most perfect form of literature, which is all that I contend for in this essay, is also the most enduring; the relics of ancient verse considerably exceed, in proportion to the bulk of the original materials, those of ancient prose, especially in ethics. Most of the philosophers are but names, and their systems traditions, at this day. Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca alone have survived, in sufficient bulk, to show what they were; giants in intellect, but babes in knowledge of the best things (the pure spiritual principles that teach the love of God and the love of man), in comparison with the humblest Christian who can read his Bible, and know, from its influence upon his heart, his conscience and his life, that it is true. Had all the writings of Greek and Roman moralists been preserved, they would but have exhibited the impossibility of man by searching to find out God, without a distinct revelation from himself. They would have been, in many respects, splendid piles of error, on which eloquence, argument, all the power, penetration, and subtilty of minds of the highest order were expended in comparatively vain speculations; resembling their temples,—prodigies of human art, science, taste, elegance, sublimity,—all that could show the immortality of man even in his mortal works, but dedicated to false gods, to idols,—the wisest among them not knowing that an idol, whether ideal or material, the idol of the sage or of the clown, is nothing in the world. Now, in the systems alluded to, whatever was false and evil was laid

down as true and good, and being mingled with whatever was really good and true, became of more perilous malignity than the extravagances and atrocities of poetry, which too often did not even pretend to regard good manners; yet of which the greater part, preserved from the devastations of time, abounding, as it does, with faults and errors, contains lessons without number, and unequalled in form and beauty, whereby the mind may be enlarged, the noblest passions moved towards the noblest objects, and the imagination chastened by morality, clear, simple, practical, and radiantly contrasted with the complex, subtle, dark, bewildering notions of most of the philosophers.

Here I conclude this rhapsody, as some may deem it, on the pre-eminence of poetry; asking only for it that indulgence, which I should be most willing to grant, for myself, to any champion of music, painting, sculpture, eloquence, history, or philosophy, who, in this place or any other theatre where liberal sentiment may be freely expressed, should plead for the pre-eminence of his favourite art over mine.

# LECTURES ON POETRY.

## N° II.

### WHAT IS POETICAL.

THE nature, or rather the essence, of poetry, I cannot define, and shall therefore not attempt it; but I think that I may illustrate the subject, and show, at least, *what is poetical*, by examples, which (if I succeed in making mine understood) any body may multiply at pleasure, and employ them as tests of whatever assumes to be poetry, by its structure, style, or colouring.

That which is highest, purest, loveliest, and most excellent to the eye or to the mind, in reference to any object, either of the senses or the imagination, is *poetical*. Poetry presents the most comprehensive view of all its subjects, in their fairest shape, and most natural symmetry, after having divested them of whatever is little, mean, or unattractive; softening asperities, blending discordances, sinking superfluities, harmonising all parts, and placing the whole in such connection, due distance, and convenient light, as shall at once satisfy the understanding with what is revealed, excite the imagination towards that which

is hidden, and prompt the curiosity to follow out all that is implied and consequential. For it is not alone the glowing images, the bold conceptions, the felicitous language, and the sublime, terrific, or delightful emotions, with which the author captivates, enchains, or surprises, both listeners and loiterers; it is not these alone which constitute the charm, and secure the dominion of poetry. No; it is principally that secret, undefined, and incommunicable art, by which the author works at once upon the mind of the reader, and sets the reader's mind at work upon itself, with thick-coming fancies, of which those lent by the poet are but the precursors; so that the longer he dwells, and the oftener the man of right feeling returns to the strain that first transported him, after the novelty and effervescence are past, he will find his own fancy, his own affections, his own intelligence, exercised anew, and not seldom in a new way, with the theme and its embellishments; which, being nature and truth (however figuratively invested), will no more weary contemplation than the most familiar scenes of the universe tire the sight. For, if there be one characteristic of poetry which exalts it above every other species of literature, as well as distinguishes it from the most refined of manual arts, it is this,—that, whatever it may be in its *essence*, genuine poetry is, in its *effect*, the highest of all mental, imaginative, and passionate enjoyments, of which the whole process is independent of the senses. I hesitate not to affirm, that no external excitement whatever does necessarily contribute towards the pleasure derived from it, for even the metre is rather address-

ed to the mind than to the ear, and is, indeed, more frequently communicated through the eye, (which, however, merely takes in the visible signs of the hidden meaning,) than either by reading aloud, or hearkening to another who reads. I appeal to those present who are most skilled in the delicacies of rhythmical periods, whether any recitation of verse, by the most accomplished declaimer, can reach the enchantment of the numbers of true poetry, which a person of fine nerve and pure taste can conceive in the silence of thought, while he looks upon the page that records them. Do not the harmonies of Shakspeare himself ring more melodiously in remembrance, than they were ever made to sound in reality from the lips of a Kemble or a Siddons?

### *Truth a Test of Poetry.*

But I am to endeavour, by illustrations of what is poetical, to enable those who choose to follow the same course of analogy, to judge for themselves of any composition in verse, whether it can justly lay claim to the former epithet. In the first place, the test of true poetry is the test of truth itself. Two Mongol-Tartar chiefs, from the borders of China, some years ago, came to St. Petersburgh to acquaint themselves with the learning and arts of Europeans; bringing this recommendation, that they were the best and most sensible men belonging to their tribe. Among other occupations, they were engaged to assist a German clergyman, resident in that city, in a translation of St. Matthew's Gospel into their native

tongue. This work was carried on for many months, and day by day they were accustomed to collate, with the minister, such portions of the common task as one, the other, or all three had completed; in the course of which, they would often ask questions respecting circumstances and allusions, as well as doctrines and sentiments, contained in the book, which, to be faithful interpreters, they deemed right to understand well for themselves beyond the literal text. On the last day, when the version was presumed to be as perfect as the parties could render it, the two saisangs (or chiefs) sat silent but thoughtful, when the manuscript lay closed upon the table. Observing something unusual in their manner, their friend enquired whether they had any questions to ask. They answered "None;" and then, to the delight and amazement of the good man, — who had carefully avoided, during their past intercourse, any semblance of wishing to proselyte them, — they both declared themselves converts to the religion of that book. So they proved in the sequel, but with that part of the history, though exceedingly interesting, we have not to do at present. One remark which the elder made, and the younger confirmed, has caused this reference to them. He said, — "We have lived in ignorance, and been led by blind guides, without finding rest. We have been zealous followers of the doctrines of Shakdshamani (the Fo of the Chinese), and have studied the books containing them attentively; but the more we studied, the more obscure they appeared to us, and our hearts remained empty. But in perusing the doctrines of

Jesus Christ, it is just the contrary; the more we meditate upon his words, the more intelligible they become; and at length it seems as if Jesus were talking with us."

Thus it is universally with truth and error. All falsehood is the counterfeit of truth, and superficially viewed may pass for the reality; but in proportion as it is examined, its pretensions disappear, and the cheat becomes manifest. On the contrary, from our hasty, negligent, or imperfect perception of it, truth may sometimes be mistaken for imposture; but when resolutely, patiently, honestly searched into, it gradually grows clearer, simpler, fuller, and at last perfect. The bodily eye, coming out of long darkness into sudden light, relapses from infirmity, — I might say, in self-defence, — into momentary blindness, but soon accommodating itself to the splendour around, all becomes natural, agreeable, and right; while new discoveries of what was utterly hidden, or unsuspected, are made, from instant to instant, till the sight has recovered its strength and penetration to comprehend the whole scene and all its circumstances. Try poetry by this standard; that which wearies, on acquaintance, is false; that which improves, is true.

The rule of Longinus, respecting the sublime, sanctions this mode of proof: — "He that hath a competent share of natural and acquired taste may easily distinguish the value of any performance from a bare recital of it. If he finds that it transports not his soul, nor exalts his thoughts, — that it calls not up into his mind ideas *more enlarged than what the sounds convey*, but, on the contrary, *its dignity lessens and*

*declines*, — he may conclude, that whatever pierces no deeper than the ear cannot be the true sublime. That, on the other hand, is grand and lofty, which *the more we consider, the greater ideas we conceive of it*; whose force we cannot possibly withstand, which sinks immediately deep, and makes such an impression on the mind as cannot easily be effaced: — in a word, we may pronounce that sublime, beautiful, and true, which *permanently* pleases, and takes generally with all sorts of men." — *Long. sect.* 10. *Smith's translation.*

We conclude, then, that poetry must be true, natural, and affecting; nay, in its most artificial array, that of pure fiction, it must be the fiction that represents truth, and which is truth, — truth in the spirit, though not in the letter. The illustrations which I am about to produce will, I hope, show the poetical aspects of certain things, — sufficiently common-place to be easily understood, yet capable of the highest ideality, by circumstance and association.

## *The Poetical in Objects of Sight.*

I begin with an ancient apologue. At Athens, I believe, on the completion of the temple of Minerva, a statue of the goddess was wanted to occupy the crowning point of the edifice. Two of the greatest artists produced what each deemed his masterpiece. One of these figures (to use an ambiguous phrase, for lack of a better,) was the size of life, admirably designed and exquisitely finished; the other was of Amazonian stature, and so boldly chiseled, that it

looked more like masonry than sculpture. The eyes of all were attracted by the first, and turned away in contempt from the second. *That*, therefore, was adopted, and *this* rejected, almost with resentment, as though an insult had been offered to the judgment of a discerning public. In this, as in similar cases, those who were nearest to both were presumed to be the best connoisseurs of the merits of each; and as they pronounced very decisively against the one and in favour of the other, the multitude in the rear, who saw neither so much symmetry in the *minor*, nor so much deformity in the *major*, yielded to authority. The selected image was accordingly borne in triumph to the place which it was to occupy, in the presence of applauding thousands; but as it receded from their upturned eyes, — all, all at once a gaze upon it, — the thunders unaccountably died away, a general misgiving ran through every bosom, and when it was at length fixed, the mob themselves stood like statues, as silent and as petrified; for the miniature figure being diminished to a point was scarcely recognised, except as an unsightly protuberance.

Of course the idol of the hour was soon clamoured down, as rationally as it had been cried up; and its dishonoured rival, with no good will, and no good looks, on the part of the chagrined populace, was reared in its stead. This, however, was no sooner done, than the rude-hewn mass, that before scarcely appeared to bear even the human form, assumed the divinity which it represented, — being so perfectly proportioned to the dimensions of the building, and to the

elevation on which it stood, that it seemed as though Pallas herself had alighted upon the pinnacle of her temple, — in person to receive the homage of her worshippers at its dedication.

Now *that* aspect of the giant-statue, at the due distance from which it was intended to be contemplated, — *that* aspect was *the poetry* of that object. In the rough reality there existed the fine ideal of the sculptor's thought, though the ordinary eye being too near could not discern it, on the ground, till, being exhibited where the whole could be seen in its whole effect, (not piecemeal, or with any necessary imperfections,) the immeasurable superiority of the well adapted work over its faultless but inappropriate rival was immediately recognised. Poetry thus places its subjects, whatever be the theme, where all their beauty, grandeur, or excellence may be clearly discovered, and where, at the same time, all their homeliness and common-place associations are excluded. This is poetry to the eye. There is also poetry to the ear. Hearken to it.

### *The Poetical in Sounds.*

I submit the preamble to Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesie :* —

" It was that memorable day, in the first summer of the late war, when our navy engaged the Dutch, — a day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed fleets which any age had ever seen disputed the command of the greater half of the globe, the commerce of nations, and the riches of the uni-

verse. While the vast floating bodies, on either side, moved against each other in parallel lines, and our countrymen, under the happy conduct of His Royal Highness, went breaking, by little and little, into the line of the enemies, *the noise of the cannon from both navies reached our ears about the city*, so that all men being alarmed with it, and in dreadful suspense of the event *which we knew was* THEN *deciding*, every one went, following the sound, as his fancy led him; and leaving the town almost empty, some took towards the Park, some *cross* the river, others *down* it; all *seeking* the noise in the depth of the silence.

"Among the rest it was the fortune of Eugenius, Crites, Lisideus, and Neander to be in company together."

I dwell not on the magnificent exordium of this passage, or the full organ harmony of period, the manly English, — I had almost said his own *English* English, so purely, so radically vernacular it is, — which distinguishes the style of Dryden; I dwell not on these, though, in all the writings of this great master, not less admirable in prose than in verse, there will hardly be found a paragraph of equal power and impression with this, and the context which I shall presently quote; — I dwell not on these, but I call the earnest attention of my audience to the simplest phrases in the whole, — "the noise of cannon from both navies reached our ears about the city." The fulness of meaning expressed, and the unutterable meanings implied in these few and plain words, cannot be too much admired. "The force of (language)

could no further go," to parody a noble line of his own; — yet a Westminster schoolboy of that day, writing to his sister in the country on the occasion, might have used the very same. Examine the sentence. *Here* is "the city," and *there* are "both navies," out of sight, but giving note of their proximity by low deaf sounds, which would not have disturbed the children at play in the streets, but which reaching "*our* ears," — the narrator is one who repeats what he himself heard, saw, felt, and did,—which reaching "our ears," threw all the adult population of the metropolis (half a million souls) into anxiety, fear, and consternation. Let us proceed: — "All men being alarmed with it, and in dreadful suspense of the event which we knew was *then* deciding, every one went, *following the sound*, as his fancy led him." The latter most picturesque and imaginative circumstance is repeated at the end of the clause, in a new and striking form of words, — "all *seeking* the noise in the depth of silence."

Thus, amidst the din and hubbub, the hurry, confusion, and whirl of men, horses, and carriages at high noon, at 'change time, a few slight percussions of the air awakened such intensity of interest and curiosity, that the town was, in a little time, left "almost empty." And what occasioned this? The inevitable association of ideas; the poetry of sounds, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have been disregarded by the ear, so that if a man had asked his neighbour whether he heard them, the other would have had to *listen* before he could answer the question. The firing of the Park and

Tower guns, on a royal birthday, made a thousand times louder reports, yet nobody was ever alarmed or startled for more than a moment: now, however, because, by these faint intonations, they *knew* what an event was "then deciding," but knew *not* what that decision, or its consequences to themselves, might be, — all the cares, the business, the dissipation of life were suspended; and the throne of the monarch might be said to tremble beneath him at every repetition of sounds, scarcely more audible than the beating of the hearts of those who were listening to them. Let us seek the result in a few lines of the sequel.

"Taking then a barge, which the servant of Lisideius had provided for them, they made haste to shoot the bridge, and left behind them that great fall of waters, *which hindered them from hearing what they desired:* after which, having disengaged themselves from many vessels which rode at anchor in the Thames, and almost blocked up the passage to Greenwich, they ordered the watermen to let fall their oars more gently; and then, every one favouring his own curiosity with a strict silence, it was not long ere they perceived the air breaking about them, like the noise of distant thunder, or of swallows in a chimney, — those little undulations of sound, though almost *vanishing* before they reached them, yet still seeming to retain somewhat of their first horror, which they had betwixt the fleets. After they had listened till such time as the sound, by little and little, went from them, Eugenius, lifting up his head, and taking notice of it, was the first who congratulated

to the rest that happy omen of our nation's victory; adding, we had but this to desire in confirmation of it, that we might hear no more of that noise which was now leaving the English coast."

The power of painting, here displayed, has almost made sound itself picturesque; and in poetical painting it may be so; it is so in those phrases, — "they left behind them that great fall of waters" (under the old London Bridge), "which hindered them from hearing what they desired;" "they perceived the air breaking around them" in "little undulations of sound, almost vanishing before they reached them;" — above all, that most magnificent and impressive close, concerning "that noise which was now *leaving* the English coast." Who does not hear the diminishing sounds? Who does not see the defeated enemy sheering off with his ships, and "the meteor-flag of England," which had "braved the battle," now "flying on the breeze" in full pursuit? Every word in the paragraph, like a gun-fire, *tells;* every touch of the pencil adds to the graphic representation of the scene, both *in* and *out* of sight; or rather, every new idea heightens the reality of it: — the mysterious murmurs, their gradual subsidence, and the happy omen, with true British spirit inferred by Eugenius, that the victory *must* have fallen to his countrymen, are all in the noblest style and the purest taste, — are all poetry in substance, — maiden poetry, and only *not* —

"Married to immortal verse."

*The Poetical of Place and Circumstance.*

But we must descend from this elevation. Imagine a small sea-port town, rank with all the ordinary nuisances of such localities, — sights, smells, sounds; mean buildings, narrow streets; the uncouth dress, coarse manners, and squalid appearance, of a poor, ill-favoured, hard-faring population, likely to be doubled in no long time by the mob of dirty, mischievous children, swarming from every corner, and frolicking in every kennel, when the dame's school breaks up at noon. The hills behind are low, unvarying, and barren; the few trees upon them stunted and straggling, — you may count them three miles off, so lonely do they look; the harbour occupied by half a score brigs and sloops, one or two masted; on the dreary beach (a mile broad at low water) you may here and there descry a fishing boat, waiting for the tide, with weather-beaten, worn-out mariners, in tarry jackets, leaning on its flanks, or walking, singly or in pairs, along the edge of the spent waves, that seem scarcely to have strength to return to their flood-mark, or even to wash back into the deep the relics of putrid fish that are strown in their way, or the wreaths of dark sea-weed which they left behind when they last retired.

But a ship appears, emerging from the ring of the utmost horizon. We must hasten to it, and step on board. On its deck stand the collected crew, eagerly, anxiously looking out for land; for he at the mast-head has already hailed it,— that very line of sand and rock, so little esteemed by us, but the

first faint streak of which, distinguishable from sky and water, makes their eyes twinkle, and their bosoms beat strongly, while for a moment they hold their breath; but then, then the most joyous cry which has been uttered since that vessel left that port, bursts spontaneously from every voice, and expresses the most cordial emotion that has been experienced on board during the long interval. "This is my dear, my native land!"—"Yonder's my home, my own sweet home!" Meanwhile, as the vessel nears the harbour, the coast itself almost seems to advance upon the waves to receive it — enlarging, brightening, swelling into loveliness and grandeur, while still in aërial perspective, with the hues of heaven and the sea upon it, and hardly appearing of the earth earthy.

Now, in the middle distance between the first glimpse and the landing place, that self-same scene, which we have shown to be so humble and unpretending in detail, shines out in fair proportions, without one flaw in colour, form, or grouping, that could displease the most fastidious painter; without one mean, revolting, or even ordinary object to break the spell which holds the eye of the indifferent beholder himself in charmed gaze. What seems it then to the home-returning mariner? His mind dwells solely on what is most dear and precious to his sweetest affections. And these are awakened by every symbol that meets his view; every slight undulation of the outline on shore; every scattered tree, familiar and endeared by old recollections, — the ruined castle on the low hill, the church-tower at

its foot, the small light-house on the jutting pier; while among the red-tiled roofs and black chimneys jammed into mass, each one on board strains to single out that for which all the rest are beloved — that which enshrines his soul's treasure, which holds his partner who is his crown, and the children who are their jewels. At this point, this middle distance, the poetry of the scene both to the eye, the imagination, and the heart, is complete; for but a little beyond it, a furlong or two nearer the spot, reality becomes too potent; — the unconcerned spectator finds himself there in the vicinity, here in the midst, of a miserable every-day town; while the transported seaman, first on the shore, the moment he leaps from the boat, and afterwards at his own fire-side, in the embraces of his wife, and the caresses of his offspring — the tears of the one, and the shouts of the other — forgets every thing but present, positive, overwhelming bliss.

In the foregoing sketch, the poetry of real life has been exemplified; for with all its sorrows, and pains, and sordid anxieties, there is much poetry in real life. *All* is not "vanity and vexation of spirit under the sun," to him who can honestly and innocently enjoy the commonest blessings of Providence. Who can behold this beautiful world, and imagine for a moment that it was designed to be the abode of miserable beings? The earth, arrayed in verdure, adorned with flowers, diversified with hill and dale, forest and glade, fountains and running streams, engirdled with the ocean, over-canopied with heaven; — this earth, so smiling and fruitful, so commodious

and magnificent, is altogether worthy of its Maker; and not only a fit habitation for man, created in the image of God, but a place which angels might delight to visit on embassies of love. All nature, through all her forms of existence, calls on man to rejoice with her in the goodness of the universal Parent. The stars in their courses, the sun in his circuit, and the moon through her changes, by day and by night display his glory; the seasons in succession, the land and the waters, reciprocally distribute his bounty. Every plant in its growth is pleasing to the eye, or wholesome for food; every animal in health is happy in the exercise of its ordinary functions; life itself is enjoyment.

Yet in the heart of man there is something which disqualifies him from the full fruition of the blessings thus abundantly dealt around him; — something which has introduced disorder into his mind, and disease into his frame; darkening and bewildering his intellect; corrupting and inflaming his passions; and hurrying him, by a fatality of impulse, to that excess in every indulgence, which turns aliment into poison; and from the perversion of the social feelings produces strife, misery, and confusion, to families, to nations, to the world. That enemy, that destroyer, what is it? — Sin! Yet so mysteriously and mercifully does God, in his providence, out of evil educe good; that much of the felicity of life as it is, arises out of the misery with which it is beset on every hand. This I may have a future opportunity of showing; but to return to our immediate subject, it is sufficient to state the fact, that poetry

finds inexhaustible materials for its most gorgeous and beautiful compositions in "the ills that flesh is heir to."

*The Poetical Aspects of visible Nature.*

"Ye stars, which are the poetry of heaven!"

This is one of those rapturous apostrophes of the author of *Childe Harold*, which occasionally burst, in fine frenzy, from the impassioned poet, like oracles from the lips of the Pythoness; unconsciously uttered, and seeming, from their very boldness and obscurity, to convey more meaning than intelligible words could express. Had the noble bard been asked, what he himself intended by this extraordinary phrase, — to make it clear might have cost him more labour in vain than *he* was wont to expend, who seldom did labour in vain, (though he often did worse) for he generally achieved what he attempted, whether it were good or evil. Without enquiring what prompted the idea to that wayward mind, which, in the context, is about consulting them as the rulers of human destinies, — there is a sense, in which, I think, "the stars" may truly and intelligibly be styled "the poetry of heaven." How? — Not certainly on account of their visible splendour; for the gas-lamps in a single street of this metropolis outshine the whole hemisphere on the clearest winter-evening: nor on account of their beautiful configurations; for the devices, chalked on the floor of a fashionable ball-room, to the mere animal eye, would be more captivating. It is from causes having

affinity to mind, not matter; to truth, not semblance; that the stars may indeed be called the poetry of heaven. Among these may be mentioned, the time of their appearance, in the solitude, silence, and darkness of night; their motion, with one consent, from east to west, each kept in its place; so slow as not to be perceptible, except by comparison, at intervals, yet accomplishing an annual revolution of the heavens, by points actually gained on their apparent nocturnal journeys: again, by our knowledge that they have had existence from the foundation of the world, when "the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;" — by their use in the firmament; being placed there "for signs and for seasons, and for days, and for years," to man. "Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven?" said the Lord, speaking out of the whirlwind to Job: "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? Or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?"— Here shines out, indeed, "the poetry of heaven;" and here we may hearken to the true "music of the spheres:"—

> "For though no real voice nor sound
> Amid their radiant orbs be found,
> In Reason's ear they all rejoice,
> And utter forth a glorious voice;
> For ever singing, as they shine,
> 'The hand that made us is divine!'"

But in a peculiar, and, to myself at least, an intensely interesting view, the stars are "the poetry of heaven." In common with the sun and moon,

they are the *only* unchanging and actual objects, which all eyes that were ever opened to the light, and lifted to the sky, have seen precisely as we see them, and precisely as they shall be seen by posterity to the end of time. Rivers stray from their channels; mountains are shattered by earthquakes, undermined by waters, or worn by the stress of elements; forests disappear, and cities rise upon their place; cities, again, are tumbled into ruins; all the works of man perish like their framer; and on those of nature herself, throughout the habitable globe, is written *Mutability*. The entire aspect of the earth, whether waste or cultivated, peopled or solitary, is perpetually undergoing transformation. Shakspeare says, "no man ever bathed twice in the same river." It may as truly be said, though the process is slower, that no two generations dwelling successively on one spot, however marked its general features might be, ever beheld the same local objects, in the same colour, shape, and character. The heavenly bodies alone appear to us the identical luminaries, in size, lustre, movement, and relative position, which they appeared to Adam and Eve in Paradise, when —

> "at their shady lodge arrived, both stood,
> Both turn'd, and under open sky adored
> The God that made both sky, air, earth, and heaven,
> Which they *beheld*, the moon's resplendent globe,
> And starry pole."
>
> *Paradise Lost*, book iv.

They appear to us the same as they did to Noah and his family, when they descended from the ark into the silence of an unpeopled world; and as they did to

the builders of Babel, when the latter projected a tower, whose top should reach heaven. They appear to us in the same battle-array as they were seen by Deborah and Barak, when "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera;" in the same sparkling constellations as they were seen by the Psalmist, compelling him to exclaim, — "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou last ordained, Lord! what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?" Once more, — and, Oh! how touching is the thought! — the stars, the unchanging stars, appear to us with the same placid magnificence as they were seen by the Redeemer of the world, when, "having sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when evening was come he was there alone," and "continued all night in prayer to God."—*Matt.* xiv. 23. *Luke*, vi. 12.

> "Cold mountains and the midnight air
> Witness'd the fervour of his prayer;
> The desert his temptations knew,
> His conflict and his victory too."
>
> WATTS.

The stars, then, have been the points where all that ever lived have met: the great, the small, the evil, and the good; the prince, the warrior, statesman, sage; the high, the low, the rich, the poor; the bond and the free; Jew, Greek, Scythian, and Barbarian; — every man that has looked up from the earth to the firmament, has met every other man among the stars, for all have seen them alike, which can be said of no other images in the visible universe! Hence,

by a sympathy neither affected nor overstrained, we can at pleasure bring our spirits into nearer contact with any being that has existed, illustrious or obscure, in any age or country, by fixing our eyes — to name no other — on the evening or the morning star, which that individual must have beheld a hundred, and a hundred times,

"In that same place of heaven where now it shines,"

and with the very aspect which the beautiful planet wears to us, and with which it will continue to smile over the couch of dying or the cradle of reviving day.

Dr. Johnson most eloquently and pathetically touches upon those feelings, which local associations are calculated to awaken, in that well known passage from his "Tour to the Western Islands," on occasion of his arrival at Icolmkill, the ancient Iona: — "We are now treading that illustrious island, which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge, and the blessings of religion. To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavoured; and would be foolish, if it were possible. Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future, predominate over the present; advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me, and from my friends, be such frigid philosophy, as may conduct us, indifferent and unmoved, over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue! That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force on

the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona."

True and beautiful, not less than sublime and tender, as these sentiments will be acknowledged by every one who has experienced the delight to which they refer, — yet such are the devastations of time, war, and civil changes, that the Saints of Iona, were they to rise from their graves, would have to search for their churches and colleges among those ruins, in which to *us*, by the force of imagination, they still exist in their glory; and the shade of Miltiades on the plain of Marathon would hardly recognise the battle-field, where he overthrew Persia, and delivered Greece. But the stars, by which the fishermen of the Hebrides,

> " Placed far upon the melancholy main,"

were wont to steer their little barks in the days of Iona's prosperity, — those stars have never missed, in their appointed rounds, to rise and set with undiminished splendour upon her desolations. And the very horoscope, to which the sentinels of both armies looked up, in the night-watch, while they longed for the morning, — that same horoscope, on the anniversary-eve of the conflict, never fails to be figured in the firmament over "the plain of Marathon." The traveller who then is belated there, may well feel "his patriotism gain force," not more from the influence of "local emotion" beneath, than from celestial inspiration above. The ever-altering earth is the abode of generation after generation, each leaving it different from what they found it.

In the perpetuity of heaven, successive generations are contemporary. The only objects which all ages have seen must bring together all ages and kindreds, in a manner which nothing else within the forms of matter or the range of mind can accomplish. No fact in history, no collocation of words in any language, no form of thought that ever originated in the mind of man, no single spot on the face of continent or ocean, has been, is, or can be, known to the whole progeny of Adam; but all, without exception, where blindness and imbecility were not combined to cut off individuals from rational communication with their fellow-creatures, — all have either seen or heard of the host of heaven, and, by one bond at least, have been connected with progenitors, contemporaries, and successors, from the creation to the day of judgment.

But these stirring sympathies are not all "the poetry of heaven," composed

> "In hieroglyphics elder than the Nile."
>
> BARBAULD.

There is yet a higher strain. In the paragraph just quoted from Dr. Johnson, we are taught, that "whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses, and makes the past, the distant, or the future, predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings." Now *this* is the very essence, and to produce it is the end of poetry; — in illustration of which the stars are pre-eminent. For, by associations of "the past, the distant, and the future," they so withdraw us from the contemplation

of themselves as objects of sense, that they actually compel us, in the idea of a star, to think not so much of what is visible and present, as of what is remote and unapparent, but not less surely real in it.

When, therefore, we behold the stars, we regard them not only as the things which they seem, — mere glittering sparks; nor as marking the returns of seed-time and harvest, summer and winter; nor as contemporaries with the whole human race, and binding with the only chain of visible connection all that have been, are, or will be, inhabitants of this globe; — but we think of them, either as sister-worlds of our own, peopled probably with beings of like passions with ourselves, or as fixed luminaries, equal or superior to our sun in bulk and splendour, set in the midst of planetary systems, giving light, and life, and enjoyment, to earths and their moons, which eye hath not seen, and of which ear hath not heard. If we think thus of them individually, what must we conceive of them collectively, but as the most extensive manifestation of the works of God, which nature can afford to the unassisted eye? Nor rest we here; — for when optical science lends the means of drawing out of invisible depths a hundred, nay, a thousand times their number more, imagination itself sinks under the effort to "find out the Almighty to perfection;" and still the devout worshipper exclaims, — "Lo! these are *parts* of his ways, but how *little a portion* is heard of them! for the thunder of his power, who can understand?" *Job*, xxvi. 14. In truth, after turning back, weary, yet exalted, from the most excursive range of telescopic vision, he who sees farthest into

the secrets of the universe must confess, "*there* was the *hiding* of his power;" the veil behind which HE retires from mortal scrutiny —

> "Whose throne is darkness in the abyss of light,
> A flood of glory, which forbids the sight;" —

while yet it shines to the lowest soundings of the sea, throughout the infinite of space, and into the heart of man. Thus, not from what they appear, but from what we know that they are, or believe them to be, we look upon these "lesser lights," which require darkness to reveal them, and in return render midnight more illustrious than noon-day, — we look upon these with a delight which purifies, and almost spiritualises, the senses themselves, as the vehicles of such unearthly revelations. Then, with a meaning more emphatic than the author of the apostrophe himself contemplated, we join our voices with his, in crying, —

> "Ye stars, which are the poetry of heaven!"

But in touching "the lyre of Heaven," (to borrow the happy figure of a living poet, in reference to the discovery of the planet *Herschel*,) there is yet another note — a key-note, which, with its chords, embodies the harmonies of all created things, whether visible or invisible, whether they belong to the material or the spiritual world.

The sun shining in his strength, the moon walking in her brightness, the stars revolving in their ranks, may all be withdrawn from the scene, and leave heaven empty, — yet *then* will be presented to the

eye and to the mind, the sublimest spectacle on which the one can look or the other can meditate. There is a brief interval between the first peep of dawn and the flush of morning, when it is no longer night, and yet not day, but akin to both. Who hath not seen (in boyhood at least), when the moon has gone down, the last star disappeared, and the sun is unrisen, — the deep blue firmament, without a shade of cloud, or a luminous speck to soil its ineffable purity? Who has not seen it swelling from the ring of the horizon into boundless amplitude above, — deepening in tone as it rises in elevation, till at the zenith its intensity of colour defies the search of human optics? The longer we gaze, the less we discern; space, infinite space, recedes, and recedes, and recedes, leaving perfect conviction that we might follow it for ever, yet never reach the roof of that vault, which, to a superficial glance, appears as solid as adamant, and as palpable as the surface of a molten mirror. Then, though no spectacle can be more august and magnificent, none can be more simple and unique. Form, colour, magnitude, all meet in the eye at once; and the image is so entire, that nothing could be added or subtracted without dissolving the whole.

Yet, all this while, we know that it is not what it first appears, — an arch of sapphire; nor what it afterwards might seem, — unoccupied, unpeopled non-entity. The mind goes to work, and, in the absence of every phenomenon that could aid imagination — from memory alone — it arrays that hyaline above in the beauty of morn, the glory of noon, the pomp of

evening, and the diversified phases of night; it darkens the vault with clouds, rends it with lightning, shakes it with thunder, deforms it with tempests; or brings forth, in season, rain, hail, and snow, vapour, and mist. But recollective imagination rests not here, in realising things unseen. All "the poetry of heaven," of which the stars are the symbols, is perused and enjoyed even to transport, in contemplating the clear, blank, beautiful expanse, —worlds, suns, and systems, numbers without number, pour into being, as they came into it, at the word, "Let there be light." We *know* that the whole material universe does verily exist within that seeming void, which we are exploring, at the same instant, with the eye of the body and the eye of thought.

Yet more, much more, than this is included (inevitably included) in the association of ideas awakened by the silent, solitary firmament. We feel that all the invisible world of spirits, disembodied or pure, — I say *feel*, because, abstract them as we may, every idea we can frame of spiritual essences will be crudely material,— we feel that all these must be somewhere within that impenetrable veil, which is itself the only perfect emblem of eternity, and *is* eternity made visible. But I dare not pursue the flight further! I must not presume to spy out "the secrets of the desolate abyss," or,

> "with the deep-transported mind, to soar
> Above the wheeling poles, and at heaven's door
> Look in."

It is enough to have pointed out the way, which

those of my auditory, who have nerve and power enough, may trace to infinity. Such, I am persuaded, will be more and more satisfied with this conclusion, which I would draw from the whole of the antecedent examples: — It is the *nature of poetry*, and the office of the poet, from things that *are* seen to disclose *things that are not* seen. And hence, to every subject that can be the theme of true poetry, the language of Scripture (neither irreverently nor inappropriately) may be extended; "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." For those objects which, by near contact, strongly affect the senses, are the realities of mortal life; which either perish in the using, or from which we ourselves must perish, and see, know, suffer, or enjoy them no more for ever. Yet the same objects, when removed to that due distance, which clothes them with picturesque or poetical beauty, by being thus made ideal, are made immortal, and of the nature of the thinking principle itself, which,

> "secured of its existence, smiles
> At the drawn dagger, and defies its point:
> The stars shall fade away, the sun himself
> Grow dim with age, and nature sink in years;
> But *this* shall flourish in immortal youth,
> Unhurt amid the war of elements,
> The wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds."
>
> ADDISON's *Cato.*

### *The Poetical in Childhood and Old Age.*

To come home to our own bosoms and personal experience. I have said, that there is much, very

much, of what is poetical even in ordinary life. Of this, Hope and Memory constitute the principal elements; and these, for the most part, are exercised in reference to age before it arrives, and childhood when it is past,—

> " Till youth's delirious dream is o'er,
> Sanguine with hope, we look before,
> The future good to find;
> In age, when error charms no more,
> For bliss we look behind."

There is this difference between rational and brute beings,—that the latter live wholly to the present time and the present scene; and it is only under peculiar excitement, when separated from their young, hurried on by the impulse of appetite, or suddenly removed to a strange place, that they seem conscious of any objects but those around them, and which press immediately upon their senses. They do not spontaneously call up recollections; the past, the absent, and the future, are alike forgotten, unregarded, or unknown. But man, endowed with intelligence, lives, in the present time, chiefly as a point between that which is gone by, and that which is to come; and in the present scene, chiefly as the centre of what is around him. He looks behind and before, above and beneath, and on either hand: but at different stages of the journey of life, his attention is more especially attracted in contrary directions.

The infant, so soon as it begins to think and reason, looks wholly before it, in the pursuit of knowledge and power, while desire increases with what it feeds upon, and hope grows out of every indulgence.

Impatient of control, and eager to exercise over others that authority, which it resents when exercised towards itself, though only for its protection, — it longs for the time when it shall be as old and as strong as its brothers, and sisters, and companions, that it may enjoy the same liberties, and assume the same airs and rights which they do.

When a little further grown, the boy,— looking up, and pressing onward, as he rises in stature, and feels new capacities expanding within him, — rebels in secret against the yoke, the reins, and the scourge, with which he finds himself ruled, however his servitude may be disguised; and he sighs for maturity, that he may go where he pleases, and do what he likes.

It is not, then, the toys, the sweetmeats, the holidays, the finery, and the caresses that are lavished upon him,— these are mere every-day matters of course, — it is something far more intellectual than any childish thing, that constitutes the charm of childish existence. "When I am a man!" is the poetry of childhood; and, Oh! how much is comprehended in that puerile phrase, so often employed by little lips, unconscious of its bitter meaning; and so unheeded by those who are men already, and have forgotten that they ever had a golden dream of that iron age, — a dream, to which all the fictions of romance are cold and unnatural! "When I am a man!" means, in the mind of a child, when he shall be no more that which he *is;* when (as he is already by anticipation) he shall be that which he is *not*,— that, which, alas! he never will be,— Lord of himself.

If we would really know, by a test which will hardly deceive us, the highest happiness of what is (mistakenly I am sure) deemed the happiest period of human life, — let us recollect what were our own emotions, when we were cherishing ideas of manhood to come, — but which never did come to the heart as it had been promised to the hope.

" When I was a child!" is the poetry of age. Man, advancing in years, enriched with the treasure of disappointed hopes, looks less eagerly before him, because he expects less good, and fears more evil, in this world, in proportion as he proves for himself what are the sad and sober realities of life. Eternity invites him to explore its mysteries, in anticipation of his approaching end; when all his love, and all his hatred, and all his envy shall cease, and there remain no longer a portion to him in all that is done under the sun. [*Ecclesiastes*, ix. 6.]

Yet, while caution and prudence, the fruits of many a failure and much suffering, make him peep warily forward into his future trials in the present state, — the circumstances of spiritual existence are so utterly unseen and inconceivable by mortal faculties, that, when his mind puts forth its feelers beyond the grave, imperfectly to apprehend a little of the terrors or the glories of an hereafter, — soon coming in contact with things with which flesh and blood can hold no communion, it draws them back with a sensitive collapse, like that which shrinks up a snail, when its telescopic eyes suddenly touch a palpable substance.

Yet not into itself alone, or even within the circumscribed horizon of the present, does the mind

retire from eternity; it takes refuge in past time, and recalls, with fondness and entrancement (unknown while they were in his power), the sports of infancy, the raptures of boyhood, and the passionate pursuits of youth. But, in the dream of memory, he forgets that while he was passing successively through these, the poetry of Hope was, in each, alluring him forward to the stage beyond; and even through the matter-of-fact period of maturity continued to decoy him from the every-day business of life, till he arrived at that barrier, where "desire faileth, because man goeth to his long home." It is from that barrier, that he daily looks less and less onward, and more and more behind him, at the scenes which he is leaving for ever, and especially at the earliest, the most endeared, though the most familiar of the whole series.

Ah! then, how naturally will some bright day, among the many clouded ones, recur to him in all its splendour, and be spent, like youth renewed, — spent over again in imagination, through all its hours, with an intensity of enjoyment which the reality never gave — never could give, subject, as all present felicities must be, to inconveniences and annoyances, forgotten as soon as they are over; while the ethereal, or rather *the ideal*, of the scenes and the circumstances alone survives in remembrance.

> "This lives within him; this shall be
> A part of his eternity.
> — Amidst the cares, the toils, the strife,
> The weariness and waste of life,
> That day shall memory oft restore,
> And, in a moment, live it o'er,

When, with a lightning-flash of thought,
Morn, noon, and eve at once are brought
(As through the vision of a trance)
All in the compass of a glance!"

It is then, in the recollection of such a day, innocently spent with friends, of whom some have been long dead, others are far separated, and a few have grown old with himself, — it is then that he can say, —

" The harmonies of heaven and earth,
Through eye, ear, intellect, gave birth
To joys, too exquisite to last,
And yet more exquisite when past!
When the soul summons, by a spell,
The ghosts of pleasure round her cell,
In saintlier forms than once they wore,
And smiles benigner than before;
Each loved, lamented scene renews
With warmer touches, tenderer hues;
Recalls kind words for ever flown,
But echoing in a soften'd tone;
Wakes, with new pulses, in the breast,
Feelings forgotten, or represt:
— The thought how fugitive and fair,
How dear and precious such things were;
That thought, with gladness more refined,
Deep and transporting, fills the mind,
Than all the follies of an hour,
When most the soul confess'd their power.
Bliss in possession will not last,
Remember'd joys are never past;
At once the fountain, stream, and sea,
They were, they are, and yet shall be."

Now, all these are of the nature of poetry — poetry in its highest, purest, most intellectual, imaginative,

and passionate form. And that verse is not poetry, which does not, in some way or other, and in no inconsiderable degree, excite sentiments, images, and associations, kindred to those which would be awakened in the mind, presented to the eye, or inspired into the soul, — by the well-proportioned statue of Minerva on her temple at Athens, — by the low sounds of battle, booming from the sea-coast, along the banks of the Thames, when the British and Dutch fleets were engaged within hearing, but out of sight, of the metropolis, — by the first view of his native land, and its nearer approach, till he beheld the smoke from his own chimney, to the mariner returning from a long voyage, — by the contemplation of the stars and the heavens, under all the aspects in which we have considered them, — by the ineffable forecastings of Hope in the bosom of the lad, who thinks to himself, much oftener than he says it, "When I am a man!" — and by the tender but sublime emotions of the man, looking back through the vista of years, and exclaiming, "When I was a child!" remembering only the delights of nutting, bird-nesting, fishing for minnows with a crooked pin, and going home at the holidays — but forgetting the tasks, the control, the self-denial, and the hard fare to which the schoolboy was subjected.

May I add, that "the Pleasures of Memory," and "the Pleasures of Hope," have had poets in our own language, whose strains, worthy of their themes, will not soon cease to animate the aspirations of youth, and hallow the recollection of age.

# LECTURES ON POETRY.

## N° III.

### THE FORM OF POETRY.

I HAVE not pretended to define poetry; but if I have, in any moderate degree, succeeded in showing what is poetical in the various instances adduced, I cannot entirely have failed in what I designed, — namely, to furnish a test whereby poetry itself may be detected wherever it exists in any species of literary composition. For it follows, that every subject which is not purely didactic or scientific, — the mathematics, for example, and these only in their principles and processes,— is capable of being treated poetically; or placed in such a light, and with such associations, natural or adventitious, as shall divest it of whatever is ordinary, gross, or mere detail, and clothe it with that ideal beauty, which is not the less real because it is only discernible at the nice distance, and in the peculiar point of view, which, by bringing out some latent excellence, or some happy incidence,

gives it a new and unexpected character. Hence, in conversation, in eloquence, in history, — indeed, in every kind of discourse, whether oral or written (at proper seasons), — the themes in hand may be poetically treated; that is, they may be exhibited in all their poetical relationships, and under those aspects may excite the corresponding emotions. But it is manifest, that such licence, in the several species of composition alluded to, and in fact in all prose, ought to be rarely employed; because poetical excitement is not required, and must be impertinent, when, instead of the passions being moved or the fancy delighted, the mind is to be instructed in abstract truths, informed of actual events, disciplined by close thinking, or entertained with moral, critical, or miscellaneous speculations. In novels and romances, poetic colouring, grouping, and invention, may be more frequently hazarded; but, even in these, the slightest excess is repulsive to good taste.

### *Verse and Prose.*

In every language, barbarous or polished (I believe), there are two modes of utterance — speaking and singing; and two kinds of cadence in the collocation of syllables, corresponding to speech and song — prose and verse. In the former, the rhythm or cadence is allowed to flow on, without interruption, into lengths and subdivisions of period, according to the requirements of the subject-matter; whereas in verse, whatever be the ductility or refractoriness of the thoughts, the strain is limited to cer-

tain successions and recurrences of clauses, not only in melodious concatenation, but harmoniously calling and responding to each other. As in every language there have been found traces of these two distinct forms of articulate utterance; — the one, from its freedom, plasticity, and plainness, adapted to the general purposes of verbal or literary intercourse; the other, confined to the special treatment of subjects in their poetical view, and peculiarly adapted to this by the music of numbers, the march of syllables, and the exuberance of ornament which these admit, that the thoughts themselves may be exalted as much above common-place notions as the cadences in which they are conveyed are more imposing than the irregular movements of ordinary discourse; — prose and verse, from these circumstances, are sufficiently distinct. When, therefore, prose occasionally (as in the example lately quoted from Dryden) presents poetical associations, and awakens poetical feelings, it departs from its usual and politic practice, — not improperly, for this is permissible and expedient on due occasions; but no good writer will be found frequently thus digressing. On the other hand, when verse employs the simplest mode of style to set forth objects that disdain embellishment, it departs in like manner from its usual and politic practice, — I will again say, not improperly, for this is permissible and expedient on due occasions; but no good writer will be found frequently thus digressing. In either case, the abuse of a legitimate privilege destroys the very character of the composition. Prose becomes poetical without the fire and spirit of

poetry; and verse becomes prosaic without the vigour and elasticity of prose. On either hand it is graceful, and even commendable, for masters in each kind of composition — and if duly qualified, they are expressly licensed by the Court of Apollo — to sally out in quest of game into the preserves of each other, expecting and allowing reprisals; but such sportsmen, in the fields of literature, must be content with a day's shooting now and then upon a strange manor, and not make a winter's campaign of a transient diversion; otherwise, at the bar of criticism, they may be made ignominiously amenable for their trespasses.

Though I have not presumed to define poetry in the abstract, some conventional meaning, in which it it will be expedient hereafter to employ the term, is necessary here. Poetry, then, in the sense which I propose to have always in mind, is *verse*, in contradistinction to *prose*; and this is the sense (define and dispute as we may respecting the ethereal quality itself) in which every body uses the word. Poetry, to be complete, must be verse; and all the wit of man cannot supply a more convenient definition. Every thing else which may be insisted on as essential to *good* poetry is *not peculiar to it*, but may, with due discretion and happy effect, be incorporated in prose. Poetry cannot be separated from verse without becoming prose; nor can prose assume the form of verse without ceasing to be prose altogether. It is true that, according to common parlance, poetry in this sense may be prosaic, that is, it may have the ordinary qualities of prose, though it still retain its peculiar vehicle, — metre; and prose may be poetical, that is,

it may be invested with all the customary attributes of verse, except that same peculiar and incommunicable one — metre. The change, however, is rarely to the advantage of either.

Yet when a writer of fine fancy and commanding powers of diction, (like Dryden, in the instance lately quoted,) from the nature and inspiration of his subject, almost unconsciously grows poetical, — the poetry of his thoughts, images, or facts, comes out as naturally as a blush or a smile over a beautiful countenance; his pathos, sublimity, or picturesque descriptions, are in season and in place; they produce their instant effect, and are gone, like the smile or the blush, while we are gazing upon them, leaving the general aspect unchanged.

Prosaic verse, every body knows, is what any body may write, and nobody will endure; nor, in a polite age, can it, under any circumstances, be rendered attractive. But poetical prose, though the dullest, heaviest, clumsiest kind of literature, has, in some notorious instances, found more favour. In French, indeed, from the absolute want of a genuine poetical diction, — neither the rhythm, the rhyme, nor the reason, it may be said, of the language, allowing "thoughts that breathe" to vent themselves in "words that burn," — a florid prose style has been adopted with signal effect in the *Télémaque* of Fenelon, which no mastery of his native tongue could have made tolerable in French verse, any more than the most consummate mastery of our own could make tolerable to a good ear in English prose. I cannot stay to justify this remark, but I am sure that it is correct.

Some works of this description, however, have been extensively read in our refractory language; but their day is gone by. The pious sentiments of "Hervey's Meditations," recommended the fantastic style in which they were disguised, to multitudes, who persuaded themselves that they were pleased, because they supposed that, in such a case, they ought to be, with fine words, and so many of them. The interesting scenes, circumstances, and actors in "The Death of Abel," translated from the German of Gesner, in like manner, made that farrago of bad taste a favourite book for nearly half a century. The language of the original, indeed, has such compass and capabilities for every kind of composition, that poetical prose, and even prosaic verse, may be made agreeable in it; but no versions of either, into our severe and uncompromising tongue, can rise above the dead level of mediocrity. Ossian's Poems, as Macpherson's rhapsodies were called, obtained, in their turn, a sudden, factitious, and deservedly transient reputation. From whatever relics of ancient song these may have been borrowed, — a question with which we have nothing to do at present,—they are composed in such "a Babylonish dialect," that it might be presumed no ear, accustomed to the melody of pure verse or the freedom of eloquent prose, could endure the incongruities of a style in which broken verse of various measures is blended with halting prose of unmanageable cadences and compound sentences, as difficult to read and as dissonant to hear as a strain of music would be in execution and effect, if every bar were set to a different time and in a dif-

ferent key. Horace's description of a heterogeneous body, compiled of flesh, fish, and fowl, to make — certainly *not*,

" Some *faultless* monster which the world ne'er saw"—

might aptly enough be applied to characterise the cacophonous rhythm, ill-jointed clauses, and dislocated feet, in all kinds of metre, of this prodigious birth of a distempered brain; in which iambics, trochees, anapæsts, dactyles, spondees, and every form of syllable, word, accent, or quantity, that can enter into English sentences, are jumbled in juxtaposition, like disrupted strata, where convulsions of nature have thrown down mountains and heaved up valleys.

### *Characteristics of Prose and Verse.*

There is reason as well as custom in that conventional simplicity which best becomes prose, and that conventional ornament which is allowed to verse; but splendid ornament is no more essential to verse than naked simplicity is to prose. The gravest critics place tragedy in the highest rank of poetical achievements, —

> " Sometimes let gorgeous Tragedy,
> With sceptred pall, come sweeping by,
> Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,
> Or the tale of Troy divine."—*Il Penseroso.*

Yet the noblest, most impassioned scenes are frequently distinguished from prose only by the cadence of the verse; which, in this species of composition, is permitted to be so loose, that where the diction is

the most exquisite, the melody of the rhythm can scarcely be perceived except by the nicest ear. King Lear, driven to madness by the ingratitude and cruelty of his two elder daughters, is found by the youngest, Cordelia, asleep upon a bed, in a tent in the French camp, after having passed the night in the open air, exposed to the fury of the elements during a tremendous thunder-storm. A physician and attendants are watching over the sufferer. While the dutiful daughter is pouring out her heart in tenderness over him, recounting his wrongs, his afflictions, and the horrors of the storm, the king awakes; but we will take the scene itself. After some enquiries concerning his royal patient, the physician asks: —

" So please your majesty,
That we may wake the king? He hath slept long.

CORDELIA.

Be govern'd by your knowledge, and proceed
I' th' sway of your own will. Is he array'd?

GENTLEMAN.

Ay, madam; in the heaviness of his sleep,
We put fresh garments on him.

PHYSICIAN.

Be by, good madam, when we do awake him;
I doubt not of his temperance.

CORDELIA.

Very well.

PHYSICIAN.

Please you draw near. Louder the music there!

CORDELIA.

Oh, my dear Father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms, that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!

KENT.

Kind and dear princess!

CORDELIA.

Had you not been their father, these white flakes
Had challenged pity of them. Was this a face
To be exposed against the warring winds?
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?
In the most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick, cross lightning? * * * *
* * * * * Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire.—And wast thou fain, poor father,
To hovel thee with swine and rogues forlorn,
In short and musty straw? Alack! alack!
'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once
Had not concluded all.— He wakes; speak to him.

PHYSICIAN.

Madam, do you; 'tis fittest.

CORDELIA.

How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

LEAR.

You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave:—
Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire.

CORDELIA.

Sir, do you know me?

LEAR.

You are a spirit, I know; when did you die?

CORDELIA.

Still, still far wide.

PHYSICIAN.

He 's scarce awake; let him alone awhile.

LEAR.

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair day-light? —
I am mightily abused. — I should even die with pity,
To see another thus. — I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands: — let 's see,
I feel this pin prick. — Would I were assured
Of my condition!

CORDELIA.

O look upon me, sir!
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me: —
Nay, sir, you must not kneel.

LEAR.

Pray, do not mock me;
I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upward; and, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man;
Yet I am doubtful; for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is; and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night: — Do not laugh at me,
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia!

CORDELIA.

And so I am; I am."

It cannot be doubted that the whole of this scene is poetry of the highest proof; and yet, except in the passage referring to the storm (in which those wonderful lines descriptive of the lightning might have

been struck out by the flash itself), there is scarcely a phrase which could not have been employed in the humblest prose record of this conversation. Try the experiment: break up the rhythm, the only thing that constitutes the lines verse, and mark the issue: the same sentiments will remain, in nearly the same words; yet the latter being differently collocated, and wanting the inimitable cadence of such verse as none but Shakspeare has been able to construct, the charm will be broken, and the pathos subdued, though no mutilation could destroy it. How much the power of poetry depends upon the nice inflections of rhythm alone may be proved, by taking the finest passages of Milton or Shakspeare, and merely putting them into prose, with the least possible variation of the words themselves. The attempt would be like gathering up dewdrops, which appear jewels and pearls on the grass, but run into water in the hand; the essence and the elements remain, but the grace, the sparkle, and the form are gone.

But, independent of the metrical arrangement of syllables, there is an indescribable mannerism which distinguishes poetry from prose. This may be best apprehended from an example, — it shall be an illustrious one, — of the same subject, treated with consummate ability by the same hand, in story and in song. The latter, however, though the poetry is manifest in every clause, is not metrically rendered in the only language through which it can be presented here. I allude to the escape of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and their passage through the Red Sea. The history of this event is given in the

fourteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus, and the choral celebration of it follows in the fifteenth. It must be confessed, in this instance, that there is such dignity in the strict narrative, that the song, which goes over the same ground step by step, scarcely produces an equal impression upon the mind of the reader. Two brief extracts may be contrasted, in which the mannerism, — it is a mean word, but I cannot find one nearer to the peculiar sense at which I aim, — the mannerism of the two distinct modes of human language, prose and verse, will be easily recognised.

" And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea, upon the dry ground, and the waters were a wall unto them, on the right hand and on the left.

" And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea; even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

" And it came to pass, that in the morning-watch, the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians.

" And took off their chariot-wheels, that they drave heavily; so that the Egyptians said, ' Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians.'

" And the Lord said unto Moses, ' Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and upon their horsemen.'

" And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the

morning appeared, and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

"And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.

* * * * *

"Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore."—*Exodus*, xv. 22—30.

I know nothing in human composition, nor even in the inspired volume itself, in majesty of fact equal to this; where the statement is so perfectly simple, and yet so strong, event after event in the series being developed without effort or exaggeration, while every sentence is a step onward to the awful unescapeable catastrophe, which is neither hurried by an elision, nor retarded by a pleonasm. I cannot proceed without reverting for a moment to the wonderful apparition in the third clause, on which the entire issue depends. No real or figurative manifestation of Deity in the Old or New Testament approaches this in circumstantial clearness of accompaniments.

"And it came to pass, that in the morning-watch, the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians."

Here, indeed, as in the holy mount, there is no similitude of the Divine Presence; yet the time, "the morning-watch,"— the station, "the pillar of fire and of the cloud," — the act, "the Lord looked out," —

are all so graphically given, that it may almost be said —

> " Invisible appears in sight
> And God is seen by mortal eye."
>
> C. WESLEY.

In the next chapter, the same events are celebrated in strains of the highest poetry; and mark the difference of manner. In the history, it is recorded for information, that *so it came to pass;* in the song, the particulars are referred to *as already known:* what in prose is circumstantially narrated, in verse is merely touched on by allusion, or splendidly amplified for ideal effect. Thus in the one, — " The waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and their left." This is plain fact, supported by an ordinary metaphor. But hear the poet: —

" With the blast of thy nostrils, the waters were gathered together; the floods stood upright in a heap; and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea." — The blast, the gathering together of the waters, the floods standing upright, and the congelation of the depths " in the heart of the sea," are all acts, images, or consequences, in the boldest style of poetic conception. This single instance will exemplify the difference of handling in the two contrasted forms of prose and verse. The historian confines himself wholly to what happened at the time and upon the spot. The poet, after having expatiated on these, becomes a prophet, looks to the issues, and foretells them. The enemies of Israel shall be smitten with terror when they hear these tidings; while to the ransomed tribes, their recent

deliverance through the Red Sea is a pledge that the Lord will accomplish the whole of the oath, which he sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to their posterity the land of Canaan for a possession. I quote the paragraphs without further comment: —

"The nations shall hear and be afraid; sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina.

"The dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away.

"Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone, till thy people pass over. O Lord! till the people pass over which Thou hast purchased.

"Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance; in the place, O Lord! which thou hast made for thee to dwell in; in the sanctuary, O Lord! which thy hands have established." — *Exodus*, xv. 14—17.

### *Jeremy Taylor.*

While we are considering poetry and prose as mighty, yea, and worthy competitors in the same field of action, equally employing weapons of finest temper, keenest edge, and brightest polish, we may state that those of our countrymen who have most excelled in that style of prose which nearest resembles poetry, are Jeremy Taylor, John Howe, and

Richard Baxter, divines of the seventeenth century; and Gibbon, Burke, Johnson, and the author of the Letters of Junius, in the century following. A few remarks on the prince of this class of writers, Jeremy Taylor, some time Bishop of Down and Connor, may not be out of place here. A paragraph from the first section of his "Holy Dying" will properly introduce these: —

"Every day's necessity calls for reparation of that portion which Death fed on all night, when we lay in his lap, and slept in his outer chambers. The very spirits of a man prey upon the daily portion of bread and flesh, and every meal is a rescue from one death, and lays up for another; and while we think a thought we die; and the clock strikes and reckons on our portion of eternity. We form our words with the breath of our nostrils; we have the less to live upon for every word we speak. * * *

"Nature hath given us one harvest every year, but Death hath two; and the spring and the autumn send throngs of men and women to charnel-houses; and all the summer long men are recovering from the evils of the spring, till the dog-days come, and then the Syrian star makes the summer deadly. And the fruits of autumn are laid up for all the year's provision; and the man that gathers them, eats, and surfeits, and dies, and needs them not, and himself is laid up for eternity; and he that escapes till winter, only stays for another opportunity, which the distempers of that quarter minister to him with great variety. Thus Death reigns in all the portions of our

time. The autumn with its fruits provides disorders for us, and winter's cold turns them into sharp diseases; and the spring brings flowers to strew our hearse, and the summer gives green turf and brambles to bind upon our graves. Calentures and surfeits, colds and agues, are the four quarters of the year, and all minister to death; and you can go no whither but you tread on dead men's bones."

Amidst all this accumulation of thoughts, power of diction, opulence of imagery, shifting of scenes, alternate darkness and light, splendour, beauty, and horror, life, death, time, and eternity — the mind of the reader is bewildered, delighted, astonished, overwhelmed; and at length retires into itself exhausted, with very little recollection of the strange process which it has undergone, while submitted to the spell of the orator. I say the *orator*, because, rich as the passage is in poetical materials, there can hardly be pointed out more than two strokes of pure poetry in the whole: — "When we lay in *Death's lap*, and slept in his *outer chambers:*" and the offices of the seasons; — "Autumn with its fruits *provides* disorders for us; winter's cold *turns* them into sharp diseases; spring *brings* flowers to *strew* our hearse; summer gives green turf and brambles *to bind* upon our graves." All the rest is rhetorical, the result of hard thinking and strong memory, with little of quick fancy or deep feeling. There are seven pages of the same kind in the context, which rather resemble an inventory of ideas and metaphors, than a select and well-harmonised array of such as would best impress the mind, and affect the heart, on the most solemn of

all subjects — man's mortality. And such is the general character of composition in the multitudinous works of this "old man eloquent." He is never carried away by the fervency of passion; he always preserves presence of mind and self-possession; he can draw upon the treasures of his imagination to any amount, and can multiply examples and illustrations at leisure, to enforce his arguments with what may be called "cumulative evidence." His crowded sentences are like piles of magnificent furniture in the upholsterer's show-rooms — not tastefully disposed in the halls and saloons of a royal palace. They resemble instruments of war, curiously displayed in a national armoury — not glittering from afar, like those of well-appointed legions marching to battle. The sight of a single weapon, worn by a known hero, would impress the imagination more than the holiday spectacle of all the artillery in the tower, especially if the possessor had achieved some great feat with it. The sword of Goliath was glorious and terrible in the giant's own grasp; but was it not a thousand times more awful to look upon in the hand of David, the stripling, when he had cut off with it the head of him who alone seemed strong enough to wield it? It is not things themselves, but the associations which they awaken, that constitute the spirit and essence of poetry.

Hence, with all his genius, learning, and industry, Jeremy Taylor never could be a poet, because he never went beyond himself — beside himself, if you will. He has put the question beyond doubt: he tried verse; but his lines are like petrifactions, glit-

tering, and hard, and cold; formed by a slow but certain process in the laboratory of abstract thought; not like flowers, springing spontaneously from a kindly soil, fresh, and fragrant, and blooming in open day. The erudite divine is always in his study. He never goes out to meditate in the field at even-tide, as Isaac did; of whom it is recorded, that "when he lifted up his eyes, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah, when she saw Isaac, lighted off her camel, and took a veil and covered herself." Thus Beauty comes to *meet* the poet in his solitary walk; reveals herself for a moment, then hides her countenance, conscious of worth

"That would be woo'd, and not unsought be won."

I have not disparaged this great man; I have only contended, that, full of poetic materials as his prose is, those materials are seldom poetically disposed. His productions, however, show, that, even without metrical arrangement, the English language can sustain its dignity under the most gorgeous array of diction, prodigality of thought, and heraldic blazonry of illustration. Our writers, therefore, who love a florid style, have no pretext for betaking themselves to "prose run mad," and dressing out their thoughts as fantastically as Lear in his frenzy. If they could make them rave as sublimely as the poor crazed king — why, then they might be forgiven.

*Hebrew Poetry.*

We conclude that poetry, in its technical form, must be verse. Verse is of various kinds, according to the language, the taste, and degree of civilisation among the people who employ it. The most ancient and simple (apparently) is the Hebrew; presuming, as we must, that the Psalms, Prophecies, and certain other portions of the Sacred Scriptures, are not poetical in substance only, but that they are metrical in the original. The secret, however, wherein their rhythm consisted, is irrecoverably lost; the language itself being only preserved in the skeleton form of consonants, with a very inadequate supply of vowels; and the words (independent of the masoretic points) resembling, if the figure may be allowed, those decayed leaves which we find in the forest in winter, of which nothing but fibres remain, like curious and delicate net-work. But in the artful structure of the sentences, in their melodious movement at times, and more especially in their corresponding members (as though every clause had its tally, every sound its echo, every image its reflection, and every thought its double), we may discover that the poetical portions of the Old Testament are in verse, of which the precise laws are no longer remembered.

Bishop Lowth, the greatest authority on this subject, says, — "The harmony and true modulation depend upon a perfect pronunciation of the language, and a knowledge of the principles and rules of versification; and metre supposes an exact knowledge of the *number* and *quantity* of syllables, and, in some

languages, of accent. But the true pronunciation of Hebrew is lost — lost to a degree far beyond what can be the case of any European language preserved only in writing; for the Hebrew, like most Oriental languages, expressing only the consonants, and being destitute of the vowels, has lain now for two thousand years *mute*, and *incapable of utterance*. The number of *syllables* in a great many words is uncertain; the *quantity* and *accent* are wholly unknown." — "The masoretical punctuation," which professes to supply the vowels, was formed a thousand years after the language had ceased to be spoken; and is "discordant, in many instances, from the imperfect remains of a pronunciation of much earlier date, and better authority, that of the Seventy, of Origen, and other writers;" and "it must be allowed, that no one, according to this, has been able to reduce the Hebrew poems to any kind of harmony."

It is certain that Hebrew verse did not include rhyme; the terminations of the lines, when they are most distinct, never manifesting any thing of the kind. *Acrostic*, or *Alphabetical* arrangement, as in the 119th Psalm, is found in several instances; and was adopted, no doubt, for the purpose of aiding the memory of the learner, or the reciter.

*Parallelism* is a principle feature in Hebrew verse: —

"He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." — *Psalm* xxxiii. 9.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him;

and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."—*Isa.* lv. 7.

Every phrase, indeed almost every word, has its response in these quotations. I have chosen the common version, in preference to that of the learned Prelate, because it is more simple (in the foregoing and following cases), and, from being familiar, is more easily intelligible when addressed to *the ear*. That organ, though marvellously quick in apprehending sounds, and their collocation, *to which it has been accustomed*, finds it exceedingly difficult to follow (in verse especially) new phrases and strange thoughts. On the other hand, in reading, *the eye* can dwell more intensely on the distinct verbiage; having, in this respect, the advantage of the ear, because in moving along the little horizon of the page, it catches glimpses of words to come, while it retains the receding traces of those that are passed; and thus is enabled to gather up the meaning, as it unfolds, from the scope both of the text and the context: for sight, like

> "The spider's touch, so exquisitely fine,
> Feels at each thread, and lives along the line;"
> *Essay on Man.*

whereas the ear can only connect the successive sounds as they are pronounced, with those that are gone by, which are often imperfectly caught, and more faintly remembered, as the discourse proceeds. I make the remark here, but apply it generally to the passages of verse which I may quote in these papers; having (for the most part) deliberately chosen those

which may be deemed common-place, because such will be best understood by the hearers, from my ineffective recitation.

Bishop Lowth exhibits various forms of Hebrew stanzas (manifestly such to the eye, and not altogether imperceptible by the ear), consisting of two, three, four, and even five lines, admirably implicated and symmetrical, from the disposition of the parallelisms, and other poetic symbols.

*Antithesis* is the second characteristic of Hebrew verse. The Book of Proverbs abounds with this figure.

"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life." — *Prov.* xiii. 12.

"The mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." — *Isa.* liv. 10.

*Amplification* is the third prevailing feature.

"As the cloud is consumed, and vanisheth away; so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house; neither shall his place know him any more." — *Job*, vii. 9, 10.

"How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth; as gardens by the river side; as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar-trees beside the waters."—*Numbers*, xxiv. 56.

Compare the harmonious cadences of this fine prose in our own old version of Holy Writ, with the

halting, dancing, lumbering, grating, nondescript paragraphs in Macpherson's Ossian.

### *Greek and Latin Prosody.*

The metres of Greek and Roman verse are the glories of those two languages: the one, the most copious, opulent, and flexible; the other, the most condensed and energetic of any that are well known. These two tongues contain treasures of literature, esteemed by the learned above all that time has spared of the works of past generations; principally, no doubt, for their intrinsic value, but partly, also, on account of their rarity and antiquity; and yet more so from the impulse of our own early prejudices in their favour, and those noble, venerable, and beautiful affinities which they hold with all that

> "Seems wisest, virtuousest, discretest, best,"
>
> MILTON.

among the most extraordinary people of the old world; living, as they did, in the light of nature, but under circumstances peculiarly favourable to the development of every kind of talent; who cultivated all the fine arts, and carried, as we have ocular demonstration, history, eloquence, poetry, architecture, and sculpture, even to the vanishing point of perfection. Nor, in the abstruse sciences, were their attainments less admirable; while, in music and painting — from contemporaneous testimony and analogy with their other accomplishments — we may presume, that they had reached

an exquisite proficiency; yet, from their ignorance of thorough bass in the one, and the perfect management of lights and shadows in the other, it is difficult to imagine that in these they could compete with the greatest masters and practitioners of modern times.

The construction of Greek and Latin verse is pretty well understood; indeed, the theory may be considered as quite made out by rule and precedent; but, after all, the true pronunciation of both languages having been in a great degree forgotten, our mode of giving utterance to their metres must be exceedingly imperfect; although we can ascertain the number of syllables in every word, and designate the quantity of each syllable; and notwithstanding the wonderful precision with which the most doubtful and difficult passages can be analysed; the most corrupt amended, if not restored; and the authenticity even of accredited readings tried by tests as subtle, and almost as infallible, as those employed in modern chemistry. Nothing, indeed, in human learning, human sagacity, or human taste, is more remarkable than the skill manifested by the Bentleys and Porsons of our days, in detecting all the niceties of a dead language; yet, from the very circumstances of the language *being* dead, — though the anatomy of every nerve and sinew be correctly demonstrated, — the life itself being gone, something must be wanting which cannot be seen, and the absence of which must be felt. Hence our perception of classical rhythm must be rendered so defective, that the most perfect tact of verbal criticism is but like the fine touch of the blind man, whereby he ascertains the

forms of substances submitted to it, while there is, in his apprehension, an undefinable accession of knowledge possessed by others, which could only be communicated to him by the opening of his eyes, — though what that phrase means, in reference to a *fifth* sense which *he* has *not*, he can no more conceive than we can of a *sixth* which does not exist.

The difference between the common reading and the scanning, according to the laws of prosody, of a Greek or Latin hexameter line (for example) is so great with modern scholars, that it is almost as difficult to imagine how these could have been rendered correspondent, so as to make the ancient pronunciation the same in prose and in verse (as it must have been, and as it is in every living tongue), — it is almost as difficult to imagine how this could have been, as how such light might be let in to the mind's eye of a man born blind, as would supply the lack of sight to his bodily eye, and enable him, without the latter, to distinguish colours, or even to conceive the idea of colour.

The different methods of pronouncing the learned languages, which obtain among scholars of different nations, according to the alphabetical sounds of their own, make them barbarians to one another when they would converse in Greek or Latin. Our countrymen, especially, must be nearly unintelligible to continentals, in much of their utterance of those very words, on the collocation of which all (in their peculiar way) dwell with rapture, and expatiate with eloquence. I speak of the general extravagant style of classical critics, — with which no other theme can

inspire them. Hence, however perfect in theory modern prosody may be, in practice it stumbles on the threshold; and it is perhaps a thousand years or more, since a line of Homer or Virgil has been repeated in the same manner as Virgil or Homer would have spoken it, — that is, with the sound which the one or the other had in his ear when he composed it. It is even a question, whether the most sonorous and magnificent period of Cicero could now be read so as the orator himself would have easily understood it.

This is an exceedingly curious and complex subject, and quite unfit to be discussed in a popular essay, were the writer himself confidently master of it, which he pretends not to be. It is, however, necessary to state, that, notwithstanding our doubts, or to speak plainly, our ignorance, of the manner in which Greek and Latin metres were recited, when a single line — an hexameter for instance — might vary from thirteen to seventeen syllables, so that six consecutive lines might be of so many different lengths, while the minor changes are scarcely computable, — there yet is found among the relics of classical song, whether read with the accents observed in prose, or according to the technical rules of metre, such accordance, strength, flexibility, and sweetness, in the combination and succession of sounds, that we feel, though we cannot tell how — we feel that there was a harmony, grace, and perfection in ancient numbers, which modern languages, in their best estate, have few capabilities of rivalling.

The incompetence of the latter may be traced, primarily, to the fact, that, with the exception of the German, none of the western and southern European dialects will sustain the length of an hexameter line; and, consequently, must fail in all the other modes of verse measured by a standard so delicate and variable as *quantity*. In English, syllabic quantity, and even accents, are so undefined, that, according to the taste of the writer, both may be ruled at pleasure, if he have but an *ear*, at once so experienced and sensitive, to modulate his cadences in such a manner that, by the flow of the preceding syllables, the reader shall be prepared to fall *inevitably* upon the precise rhythm which he had predetermined for the line. This, however, is so rarely achieved, that, in our anapæstic or dactylic verse (except in the most monotonous strains), it is scarcely possible for a good reader, even when the verse is good, to run through half a dozen couplets without stumbling half as many times. All attempts, therefore, to frame poems with our brief, unfettered, Saxon idioms, on the principles of those in the learned languages, must be hopeless. Men of the greatest skill have miscarried here; and I know not that success were desirable, since it could not be attained, except by enthralling with foreign fetters our free-born British speech.

Not having a modern example at hand, — though the enterprise has been effected with as much good speed as our slippery tongue would allow, by Dr. Southey, — I shall offer a few lines of Sir Philip Sidney's, from a pastoral in his *Arcadia*; a book once celebrated by all the wits and beauties of an age

of gallantry, though probably not read through by six of either class during the last half century: —

" Lady, reserved by the heavens, to do pastors' companie
honour,
Joyning your sweete voice to the rurall Muse of a desart,
Here you fully do finde this strange operation of love,
How to the woods Love runnes, as well as rides to the
palace;
Neither he beares reverence to a prince, nor pity to a
beggar,
But, like a point in the midst of a circle, is still of a
nearnesse;
All to a lesson he draws, neither hills nor caves can
avoid him."

These lines are not amiss; but who could survive an Iliad of them? One great defect in our English tongue (heart of oak as it is in strength and toughness), is the paucity of spondees in its vocabulary. Without these, no hexameter can close well, or be well balanced in its progress. Under such a disability, our language becomes supple and languid in ancient metres, instead of elastic and rebounding to its natural tone, after the utmost flexure or tension which the laws of such labours require.

### *Modern Metres and Forms of Verse.*

It is not needful, nor would it be expedient, to trouble the audience before me with any detailed account of the different species of verse in our own and other contemporary languages. Suffice it to say, that though *quantity* is not altogether discarded, it is

comparatively little employed in the construction of vernacular poetry. When happily managed, however, a slight infusion of it greatly enriches and ennobles some of our measures, especially in the hardy and intricate rhythm of blank verse; but it requires fine taste, and an imperial command of apt and confluent words, to venture far beyond the avoidance of crude elisions, such as make our beautiful English barbarous to the eye and horrid to the ear. Milton frequently innovates upon the high harmonies of his *accented* verse with the substitution of *quantities;* sometimes difficult at first sight to master, but generally admirable in effect, and heightening, even when harshest, the majesty of his strains — like a momentary crash of discord, thrown, by the skilful organist, into the full tide of instrumental music, which gives intenser sweetness to what follows. Thus, when he represents Satan among his summoned legions, —

> " Godlike shapes, and forms
> Excelling human, princely dignities,
> And powers that erst in heaven sat on thrones,"

he thus depicts their leader: —

> " He, above the rest,
> In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
> Stood like a tower: — his form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appear'd
> Less than archangel ruin'd, and the' excess
> Of glory' obscured."
>
> *Paradise Lost*, book i.

In this brief clause there are no less than four supernumerary syllables in so many successive lines, if

verse is to be computed by the fingers, and not by melodious pulsations of sound, true to time, and touching the ear within a given space. This fine image would, indeed, resemble its prototype, as described in the sequel, and be "shorn of its beams," if, instead of "stood like a tow-er," we were to read, "stood like a tow'r;" for "all its original brightness," "all its orig'nal brightness;" but especially if we were to curtail the article, and for "glory" substitute "light;" saying for "the' excess of glory' obscured," "*th'* excess of *light* obscured;" which would be according to mere numerical metre.

Though a little out of place, as it crosses our way, I cannot refrain from pointing out a most singular prosopopoiea which occurs in this passage, but which is so eclipsed by the shaded splendour of the context, as perhaps never before to have attracted critical notice: —

> "His form had not yet lost
> All *her* original brightness!"

Here the very *person* of the fallen Angel is *personified*, as though that were but an *accident* of his nature, not *himself*, and "the intellectual being" were as distinct from it as the soul of man is from his body. This, indeed, is a necessary condition of presenting spirits in any mode apprehensible by the senses.

Another line of Milton's has been quoted as full to overflowing with quantity: —

> "O'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp."

Here *thirteen* distinct syllables occupy *the time* and place of *ten* only. But the boldest and most successful sally of the kind, in which he achieves a triumph for his mother tongue, and exalts it almost to rank with Homer's, occurs in the menace of the spectre at hell-gates to Satan, attempting to pass them. Death,

> " that other shape,
> If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none
> Distinguishable' in member, joint, or limb,"

thus threatens the Arch-Fiend : —

> " Back to thy punishment,
> False fugitive! and to thy speed add wings,
> Lest with a whip of scorpions I pursue
> Thy lingering, — or, with one stroke of this dart,
> Strange horror seize thee', and pangs unfelt before."

The hand of a master is felt through every movement of this sentence, especially towards the close, where it seems to grapple with the throat of the reader; the hard *staccato* stops, that well nigh take the breath, in attempting to pronounce " or, with one stroke of this dart," are followed by an explosion of sound in the last line, like a heavy discharge of artillery, in which, though a full syllable is interpolated even at the cesural pause, it is carried off almost without the reader perceiving the surplusage, —

> " Strange horror seize thee', and pangs unfelt before."

I will not expatiate.

But these redundancies, though allowable in heroic, and commendable in dramatic, are seldom to be tolerated in lyric poetry; so that, on the whole, our verse must be modulated by accent, not by quantity, except in the free and frequent use of such words and phrases as "heaven, power, spirit," and a few others, which are feeble when employed as dissyllables, but enrich the harmony when employed as one; that is, when uttered distinctly, but in the time of one. The phrase "many a," is sanctioned by a similar licence: —

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."
GRAY.

Here "many a flower," *five* syllables, absolutely stands in the place of *three;* and a clear tongue will touch upon each so delicately that a common ear must feel the beauty of their full expression, and abhor the elision of a pretended supernumerary vowel.

On the brevity of metrical lengths in modern languages, it may be added, that English Iambic verse will seldom bear drawing out into more than ten syllables. Yet our elder poets composed long works in twelve, and even fourteen. Chapman's version of the Iliad is in the latter measure: —

"Achilles baneful wrath, O goddess! that imposed
Infinite sorrows on the Greeks, and many brave souls losed
From breasts heroique; sent them far to that invisible cave
That no light comforts, and their limbs to dogs and vultures gave."

Drayton's Polyolbion — a work once famous, though now scarcely known except by its uncouth name — is in twelves. It is, indeed, one of the most learned and ingenious poems in the language, and unique in literature; being a treasure-house of topographic, antiquarian, and traditional lore, which the heavy versification alone was sufficient to sink into neglect, even if public taste had not changed since the age of garrulity, which it was written to instruct and entertain. The stag-chase in the forest of Arden is a masterpiece of its kind. These are the opening lines: —

" Now when the hart doth hear
The often-bellowing hounds to vent his secret leir,
He, rousing, rusheth out, and through the brakes doth drive,
As though up by the roots the bushes he would rive;
And through the cumbrous thicks, as fearfully he makes,
He, with his branched head, the tender saplings shakes,
That, sprinkling their moist pearls, do seem to weep: —
When, after goes the cry, with yellings loud and deep,
That all the forest rings, and every neighbouring place,
And there is not a hound but falleth to the chase;
Rechating with his horn*, which then the hunter cheers,
While still the lusty stag his high-palm'd head upbears,
His body showing state, his unbent knees upright,
Expressing, from all beasts, his courage in the fight."

*Polyolbion*, song xiii.

The line of fourteen syllables has long been abandoned; but out of it sprang the easiest of all our

* One of the measures in winding the horn in the chase.

lyric staves — the "common measure," as it is called, alternately of eight and six syllables, the division occurring where the cesura almost necessarily fell in the old form. The line of twelves is also become obsolete, except as occasionally interpolated with the heroic standard of ten, or employed in stanzas of unequal numbers. In the former case it was called the "Alexandrine," and was introduced almost exclusively in triplets at the close of long periods. Though much used by Dryden, few of his successors have deemed the precedent valid; indeed, it is plain that he himself often used it from slovenliness, to catch the overflowings of thought, when he was in too great haste to train it through those regular channels, which no versifier had ever greater facility to command than Dryden, when he was not writing against time to his own loss, — for Time, like the tortoise in the race with the hare, has overtaken the fleet-footed bard, and avenged his own wrongs by obliterating almost all the hurried footsteps of his competitor.

### *The Spenserian Stanza and the Sonnet.*

The twelve-syllable line, however, has lately risen again to distinction in the Spenserian stanza, which Thomson, in his Castle of Indolence — certainly not in one of his fits of indolence — had ventured to revive. This, though complex and difficult in construction, has become a favourite one for long narrative, since the resurrection of genuine poetry, after its long intermediate state of suspended animation

(with a few brief waking intervals) between the death of Pope and the appearance of Cowper. The circumstance is the more remarkable, because Spenser himself — great, admirable, and unrivalled as he is in some respects — had long ceased to be popular. The stanza itself is a very curious knot which requires the nicest skill to tie gracefully. In form it is as compact as the Italian sonnet, with this difference, — that the stanza is unique, whereas the sonnet is double. The latter consists of two quartrains and two triplets; and the harmony of the whole would be broken, not only by the addition or retrenchment of a line, but even by a less rigid arrangement of rhymes and clauses, in the fourteen lines of which it is composed. The Spenserian stanza is likewise so finely proportioned, and so artfully implicated, that no single rhyme can be withdrawn or appended, nor its station varied, without dissolving the musical effect of the whole. The sonnet is a poetical air in two parts, the stanza is a strain in one; each perfect in its kind, but only *good* when *very good*.

The Spenserian stanza, after all that has been done to support its credit, and though it is the richest and most sonorous, perhaps, that could be invented, becomes occasionally wearisome both to the poet and the reader, even when in the hands of a master. No wonder, then, that the inexperienced adventurer often sinks under this cumbrous harness, or that his readers lose half of the poetry of a paragraph in hunting after the sense, weakened, obscured, and embarrassed, as it may be, by inverted construction, uncouth phraseology, and inadequate expression,

adopted to compress or expand the lines in order to meet the rhymes due at the prescribed points. In a language so poor in inflections as our own, it is not prudent to introduce more than three rhymes at the most in the same verse, and these should be placed at moderate intervals. In the stanza before us there are *four* similar ones between the second and the seventh lines, interwoven with *two* of different kinds, of which one echoes to the ending of the first line, and the other must be in consonance with those of *the last couplet*. It follows, that from the number and remoteness of these corresponding terminations, the meaning and the verbiage can seldom keep pace with each other; but, for the sake of jingling at the proper stages, they must ride and tie alternately (as two countrymen, with but one horse between them, sometimes do) to the end of the journey. I decline to give a specimen, because it would take up too much time to analyse; otherwise I could show the sense absolutely *halting* on foot in *the first line*, while the diction *rides post* to the end of the *third* to catch a rhyme; then the sense takes its turn, and, mounting at the commencement of the *fourth line*, proceeds full gallop (though we nearly lose sight of it in the dust and cloud of words) to the final syllable of the concluding line.

This fault, rather of the measure than of the minstrel, prevails more or less through the most celebrated compositions of late authors in the Spenserian stanza, — a disadvantage greatly to their own prejudice, as well as productive of much perplexity to their readers. The highest pleasure communicated

by poetry is experienced from the *first* impression of its words, images, and sentiments, clearly and instantaneously understood. If the novelty of the thought be past before the reader can comprehend the form of words in which it appears, though both the novelty and the beauty of the passage may strike him, they will not strike him *at once*, but *successively*, — the novelty first, the beauty afterwards; — nor will either, singly, be felt so forcibly, as each, distinctly, would have been in combination with the other. This will hold true with regard to all works of literature in the vernacular tongue. The slowness with which we enter into the peculiar meaning of words, and the *expected* gradations by which the elegancies of thought and diction are disclosed to us in a foreign idiom, will not invalidate the observation; for the pleasure derived from this kind of reading is different in nature as well as in degree from the former. The perusal of a poem in a strange tongue is an effort of spontaneous study — a strong and healthful exercise of mind, memory, and reflection; whereas a poem in our own ought to be a solace from severer tasks, and almost a passive recreation of the heart or the fancy.

It is due to Spenser to give the model of this exquisite but intricate stanza, from his own great work, and I take the first that occurs in the "Faerie Queene."

"Lo, I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
As time her taught, in lowly shepheards' weeds,
Am now enforst, a farre unfitter taske,
For trumpets sterne to change mine oaten reeds,

And sing of knights' and ladies' gentle deeds;
Whose praises, having slept in silence long,
Me, all-too-mean, the sacred Muse areeds
To blazon broade amongst her learned throng;
Fierce wars and faithful loves shall moralize my song."
*Faerie Queene*, book i. canto i.

A few words more concerning the sonnet. There is not a popular one in the English language; there are hundreds in the Italian. Whence comes this disparity? — Many of the best sonnets of our greatest authors — Shakspeare, Spenser, Milton, Gray, Cowper, and Wordsworth — are exceedingly unequal in their texture, obscure in their verbiage, and lumbering in the motion of their verse. The Italian ones remarkably contrast with these; being distinguished, even above other poetic compositions in that most delicate, voluble, and melodious tongue, by exquisite finish in respect to diction, clear development of the one fine thought which they enclose, and the musical succession of cadences carried through to the last syllable of the fourteen lines, — lines so admirably arranged, that the place of each in the tune (if we may so speak) can be almost known by the ear, as well as by the correspondence of rhyme, and connection of sentiment. The sonnet, therefore, has been unworthily depreciated in England, because it has been imperfectly exhibited by English writers; partly from the difficulty of furnishing relays of rhyme to meet at the appointed stations, and partly from the Procrustean model, on exact attention to which the perfection of the sonnet depends.

If it be asked, Why should a sonnet be confined to

fourteen lines rather than any other number? I know not that the question can be better answered than by asking another, — Why should the height of a Corinthian column be ten diameters? The cestus of Venus must be of some particular length, both to fit and to adorn the person of the goddess: a hand-breadth taken away would have left it scanty, and a hand-breadth superadded would have made it redundant. The quota of lines, and the arrangement of rhymes and pauses, already established in the regular sonnet, have been deemed, after the experience of five centuries, incapable of improvement by extension or reduction; while the form itself has been proved to be the most convenient and graceful that ever was invented, for disclosing, embellishing, and encompassing the noblest or the loveliest, the gayest or the gravest idea, that genius, in its happiest moments of rapture or of melancholy, could inspire. The employment of this form by the finest Italian poets, for expressing, with pathos and power irresistible, their selectest and purest conceptions, is an argument of fact against all speculative objections, in favour of the intrinsic excellence and unparalleled perfection of the sonnet.

Our contemporary, Mr. Wordsworth, (whatever may have been done before him,) has redeemed the English language from the opprobrium of not admitting the legitimate sonnet in its severest, as well as its most elegant, construction. The following, though according to the strictest precedents, and therefore the least agreeable to unaccustomed ears, is full of deep harmony, strong sentiment, and chastised, yet

impassioned, feeling. The Tyrolese, amidst their Alpine fastnesses, are represented as returning this lofty answer to the insulting demand of unconditional surrender to French invaders. If their own mountains had spoken, they could not have replied more majestically: —

" The land we, from our fathers, had in trust,
And to our children will transmit, or die;
*This* is our maxim, *this* our piety;
And God and Nature say that it is just:
That which we *would* perform in arms, we *must!*
We read the dictate in the Infant's eye,
In the Wife's smile; and in the placid sky,
And at our feet, amid the silent dust
Of them that were before us. *Sing aloud,*
OLD SONGS — the precious music of the heart!
Give, herds and flocks, your voices to the wind,
While we go forth, a self-devoted crowd,
With weapons in the fearless hand, to' assert
Our virtue, and to vindicate mankind."

# LECTURES ON POETRY.

## N° IV.

### THE DICTION OF POETRY.

*Alliterative English Verse.*

ENGLISH verse may be constructed according to three forms,—alliterative, with rhyme, or simply metrical (blank, as it is called).

"Pierce Plowman's Vision," by William Langlande, who lived in the reigns of Edward III. and Richard II., and published his poem about the year 1350, is the largest specimen of alliterative poetry bequeathed to us from remote times. This kind of versification is founded upon Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon models; and neither depends for its effect upon the quantity of the syllables, their number, their particular accent, nor yet their rhyming terminations, but consists in an artful repetition of the same sounds, at least three times in each distich. The lines, likewise, have a certain slipshod cadence, with a marked cesura about the middle of each; and, on the whole, they read much more like Greek or

Roman measures than any others in our language. A brief sample will be found not altogether unagreeable to modern ears. Much of Chaucer, on account of his lame metres, is harder to be read than the following:—

" Thus robèd in russet, I roamèd about,
All a summer-season, to seeke *Do-wel*,
And freyned * full oft, of folke that I mette,
If any wight wist where *Do-wel* was at inne †;
And what man he might be, of many I askèd;
Was never wight, as I went, that me wysh ‡ could
Where this laddie lenged § lesse or more,
Till it befel on a Fryday, two fryers I mette,
Maisters of the minours, men of greate wytte;
I halsèd hem hendlye ‖, as I had lernèd,
And prayèd hem for charitie, or they passed furthur,
If they knewe any courte or countrye as they went,
Where that *Do-wel* dwelleth, do me to wytte ¶,
For they be men on this moulde, that most wide walke,
And knowe countries and courtes, and many kinne's places,
Both princes' pallaces, and poore mennes cotes,
And *Do-wel* and *Do-evil*, where they dwel both.
—' Amongst *us*,' quoth the minours, ' that man is dwellinge,
And ever hath, as I hope, and ever shall hereafter.'
—' *Contra*,' quod I, as a clarke and cumsed to disputen,
And said him sotheley, ' *Septies in die cadit Justus*,'
' Seven sythes **,' said the Boke, ' synneth the rightfull,'
And who so synneth, I say, doeth evil, as men thinketh,
And *Do-wel* and *Do-evil* may not dwell together;

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* Enquired. † Dwelt. ‡ Tell. § Lived.
‖ Saluted them kindly. ¶ To inform me. ** Times.

*Ergo*, he is not alway among you fryers,
He is other whyle elsewhere, to wyshen the people.'
'I shall say thee, my sonne,' said the fryer than,
'How seven sythes, the sadde * man on a day synneth,
By a forvisne †,' quod the fryer, 'I shall thee faire shewe;
—Let bryng a man in a botte ‡ amid the brode water;
The winde and the water the botte wagging §,
Make a man many a time to fall and to stande;
For stande he never so stiffe, he stumbleth if he move;
And yet he is safe and sounde, and so him behoveth;
For if he arise the rather, and raght to the steer,
The winde would with the water the botte overthrow,
And then were his life lost through latches of himselfe. ||

Our elder poets often availed themselves of "apt alliteration's artful aid," (as Churchill significantly calls it,) in their minor pieces: —

"The life is long, that lothsomely doth last,
The dolefull dayes draw slowly to their date;
The present panges and painfull plagues forepast,
Yielde griefe aye greene to stablish this estate."
*Anonymous.*

Shakspeare has many fine touches of this poetical seasoning, which, indeed, is seldom otherwise than pleasing, when unobtrusively thrown in. If the vowel *i* be pronounced in the substantive "*wind*," as it is in the verb "*to wind*," the effect of the

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* Sober. † A simile. ‡ A boat.
Rocking the boat. || By his own carelessness.

double alliteration in the following line will be exceedingly impressive :—

" The churlish chiding of the wintry wind."

To show how subtle the charm of exquisite verse may be, let " wind" be pronounced with the usual flat *i*, and the " wintry wind" will be hardly endurable.

Later poets, even the most eminent, have not disdained to employ this pretty artifice. Gray, one of the most fastidious of the tribe, was even fond of it.

" Ruin seize thee, ruthless king!
Confusion on thy banners wait;
Though fann'd by conquest's crimson wing,
They mock the air with idle state."

Alliteration, open or occult, may be traced through every turn of this brief paragraph.

Young, in his most sombre lucubrations, and epigrammatic arguments, plays with alliteratives in his own quaint way : —

" Fondness for fame is avarice of air !"

## *Rhymed Verse.*

Our national verse may be written either with rhyme or without it. By universal usage, however, rhyme seems to be almost indispensable in lesser metres, to distinguish the lines in recitation, and give a certain finish to the cadence of each; as though the strain were set to some kind of music, which played

during the delivery, but called not off attention from the subject, the thoughts, nor the language;—as conversation may be carried on in a drawing-room, while low, sweet, undisturbing instrumental harmony in the vestibule, or under the window, is heard, though not listened to, all the time. In fact, rhyme is a running bass accompaniment, that wonderfully aids the spirit and melody of the song, throughout which, without being distinctly regarded, it is, nevertheless, so interfused, that if it be suspended for a single note, the spell is broken; and treble, alt, tenor,—soaring, sinking, swelling, or passing by the most subtle transitions through the whole diapason of their range,—seem to want the sustaining power which kept them afloat and accordant. But rhyme ought ever to be subdued, and made subsidiary to the richer and more varied rhythm of the lines: for the instant it becomes conspicuous by its singularity, it attracts attention from the theme to the mechanism of the verse; and offering no more than a tinkling, momentary sound to the ear, it either displeases at once as an interruption, or soon becomes offensive because it is frivolous. Rhymes should be employed as expletives,—graceful only when they are not reflected upon; or, rather, as an element of composition, resembling air, light, health, and other of the higher and more essential requisites of happy existence, which are breathed, seen, enjoyed, without disturbing the common tenour of our feelings. When thus adapted, rhyme becomes an ingredient, so equally blended with the other constituent parts of good verse, as to do its office not less quietly, nor less

effectively, in upholding the general harmony, than the articles of nouns, auxiliaries of verbs, and other small words, which occur over and over, again and again, in all kinds of discourse, as well as literary composition, and not less in prose than in poetry. These particles, though noticed by nobody, unless bunglingly brought in, are nevertheless felt by all to be absolutely necessary for the purpose of connecting, adjusting, and filling up the verbal import of every sentence.

Rhyme may be a snare to idle versifiers, with whom,

> " One line for sense, and one for rhyme,
> Are quite sufficient at one time :"

These it may betray into verbosity; while

> " The mob of gentlemen who write with ease"

may be tempted, by its " fatal facility," to copy the practice of Elkanah Settle,

> " Who faggoted his notions as they fell,
> And if they rhymed and rattled, all was well."
>
> DRYDEN.

But the genuine poet, who knows how " to build the lofty *rhyme*," in the higher as well as the vulgar sense of the word,—he, in the search after consonant endings, will start many a noble image and idea, while he is only pursuing a sound. So far from being seduced to attenuate his matter for the accommodation of recurring points, where the rhymes must strike in like oars in rowing, which, while they

feather the surge, and make it flash in the sun, impel the boat onward, and accompany the song of the seamen,—the genuine poet, of whom we speak,—like Pope, the greatest master of rhyme in our own, or perhaps in any language, because in none other is it so difficult, shy, and perverse*,—will deliberately prefer it, for the remarkable reason which he states in the introduction to his "Essay on Man," because of its *power of compression!* Hear him:—

"If I could flatter myself that this Essay has any merit, it is in steering betwixt the extremes of doctrines seemingly opposite; in passing over terms utterly unintelligible, and in forming a temperate yet not inconsistent, and a short yet not imperfect, system of ethics. This I might have done in prose; but I chose verse, and even *rhyme*, for two reasons. The one will appear obvious;—that principles, maxims, or precepts, so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards. The other may seem odd, but it is true;—I found that I *could express them more shortly this way than in prose itself;* and nothing is more certain, than that much of the force as well as

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* In proof of this may be mentioned the simple circumstance of *plural nouns* ending in the consonant *s*, while in *verbs*, the usual termination of the third person singular, present tense, (that which of all others occurs the oftenest) is the same. This is a source of perpetual sorrow and plague to metre-mongers, and probably curtails the available rhymes in the English tongue, one fourth of what they might be, were the unmanageable *s* equally the termination of either singular or plural nouns and verbs.

grace of arguments or instructions depends on their conciseness."

To this may be added, that if poets understood the secret of compression thus ingeniously expounded, and if they practised it after the example of their preceptor,—poetry, instead of being the dullest, heaviest, and least attractive species of literature to the great mass of readers, which I do not hesitate to acknowledge that it is, would be, at least, as generably acceptable as imaginative and intellectual prose. It is *not*. "Do you like poetry?" said the Frenchman to his friend. "O yes!" replied the other, "*next* to prose!" This is the real sentiment of many a reader of feeble, fanciful, fashionable verse,—ay, and of verse of the first order,—who has neither courage nor ingenuousness to avow his indifference; indeed, who will hardly acknowledge it to himself, though he has shrewd misgivings, which he represses, because they make him suspect that he must be miserably deficient in taste. The reason is plain; and even good poets have too often to thank themselves for the failure of their most elaborate efforts, because they *will not* write naturally, but rather choose to disguise common sense with oracular ambiguity, and trick out common-place in the foppery of euphuism. It is impossible to please people by convincing them that they *ought* to be pleased: you must make them, that *they cannot help being so*. How to do that, I pretend not to teach.

Let us try a paragraph from the "Essay on Man," by the poet's own gauge,—elegant compression:—

" Ask for what end the heavenly bodies shine,
Earth for whose use?— Pride answers, 'Tis for mine;
For me kind nature wakes her genial power,
Suckles each herb, and spreads out every flower;
Annual for me the grape, the rose renew
The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew;
For me the mine a thousand treasures brings,
For me health gushes from a thousand springs;
Seas roll to waft me, suns to light me rise,
My footstool earth, my canopy the skies."

This brilliant clause shows the fine tact and masterly management of the ten-syllable couplet, peculiar to Pope, who is at once the most affluent in resources, and yet the most compact and energetic in the employment of them, of all writers in rhyme (without any exception) in our language. Here all the great features of the visible universe, the bounties of Divine Providence, and the general business of human life, are presented in the smallest possible compass consistent with distinct and harmonious arrangement: sun, moon, and stars; earth, ocean, air; flowers, fruits, harvest, and vintage; wealth, luxury, commerce: and, the "end" of all,— the gratification of the rational creature! It is remarkable, that throughout this melodious flow of never-tiring numbers, the cæsural pauses float between the fourth and fifth, and the fifth and sixth syllables. This, probably, was accidental, the poet being ruled solely by the infallible test of his ear, which most exactly suited the cadence and consonance of the verse to the subject. It has been suggested, that it would improve the passage *morally*, if these lovely lines, and lovelier sentiments, instead of being uttered

by Pride, in supercilious vaunting, had been put into the mouth of man himself, as the grateful beneficiary of his Maker. It is with the diction, not the morality, of this brief extract from a long and implicated argument that we have to deal at present; and I state this "new reading" for no other purpose than to show on what nice and subtle adaptation of sound to sound, not less than of sense to sense, depends the perfection of verse to the ear, through which it must (however we may reason against it) affect the mind. Let the amendment be put, and I am sure that it will be negatived without a division.

"Ask for what end the heavenly bodies shine?
Earth for whose use?—Man answers, 'Tis for mine."

Is not the sweet accordance of the whole clause marred by the jangle of "*Man answers,*" instead of the sharp, clear phrase, "Pride answers," &c.

"Ask for what end the heavenly bodies shine?
Earth for whose use?—Pride answers, 'Tis for mine."

### *Blank Verse.*

Blank verse is principally confined to the drama, and compositions in our five feet measure of ten syllables; nor is there any probability that it will ever much transgress those bounds; a circumstance which seems to establish rhyme as a vital principle in minor pieces,—songs, ballads, odes, and octo-syllabic effusions. There is, indeed, one splendid and victorious exception to the unmanageableness of

blank verse in metres of every kind, and this too in an epic poem. Concerning "Thalaba,"—the "wild and wondrous tale," as the admirable author, Dr. Southey, himself styles it,—whatever be thought of the eccentricities of the plot, or the moral to be deduced from fictions the most preternatural, the success of the experiment of framing that prodigy of song in numbers of all lengths and cadences, without rhyme, cannot be doubted, by those whose ears and hearts are tuned alike to all the varieties of rhythm of which our language is capable, associated with the most gorgeous imaginations that modern poetry has conjured up and converted into realities.

For myself, I am free to acknowledge, that the effect produced on my mind by the perusal resembled the dreams of the Opium-eater, especially that magnificent one, which "commenced with a music of preparation and awakening suspense; a music like that of the Coronation anthem, and which, like *that*, gave the feeling of a vast march—of infinite cavalcades filing off; and the tread of innumerable armies. The morning was come of a mighty day,—a day of crisis and final hope for human nature, then suffering some mysterious eclipse, and labouring in some dread extremity. Somewhere, I knew not where; somehow, I knew not how; by some beings, I knew not whom; a battle, a strife, an agony was conducting, was evolving like a great drama, or piece of music; with which my sympathy was the more insupportable from my confusion as to its place, its cause, its nature, and its possible issue. I, as usual in dreams, where of necessity we make our-

selves central to every movement, had the power, and yet had not the power, to decide it. I had the power, if I could raise myself, to will it; and yet had not the power, for the weight of twenty Atlantics was upon me, or the oppression of inexpiable guilt.

"'Deeper than plummet ever sounded,' I lay inactive. Some *greater* interest was at stake; some mightier cause than ever yet the sword had pleaded, or trumpet had proclaimed. Then came sudden alarms, and hurryings to and fro; trepidations of innumerable fugitives; I know not whether from the good cause or the bad; darkness and lights; tempest and human faces; and, at last, *with the sense that all was lost*, female forms, and the features that were worth all the world to me, — and *but a moment* allowed, — and clasped hands, and heart-breaking partings, and then everlasting farewells! and with a sigh, such as the caves of hell sighed, when the incestuous mother uttered the abhorred name of *Death*, — the sound was reverberated — everlasting farewells! — and again, and yet again, reverberated — everlasting farewells! And I awoke in struggles, and cried aloud 'I will sleep no more!'"

This dream has transported me too far: — I return. Such music, such mystery, such strife, confusion, agony, despair, with splendours and glooms, and alternations of rapture and horror, the tale of "Thalaba the Destroyer," with its marvellous rhythm and Oriental pageantry, produces on the mind of the entranced, delighted, yet afflicted reader — so, at least, it affected me. I have said that the

experiment was victorious, but the author himself has not ventured to repeat it; like a wise man (which poets seldom are, especially successful ones), contenting himself with the glory of having performed an unprecedented feat, and which may very well remain an unrivalled one. He was probably aware that he could not excel it in a second attempt, and unless he did that (with the usual disheartening judgment of the multitude on like occasions), he would have been deemed to have fallen short of it, merely because the novelty being gone by, in which much of the pleasure of surprise at the performance necessarily consisted, it would only appear like an ordinary achievement.

In smaller poems, blank verse has been rarely tried, except in numerous and nameless imitations of an indifferent prototype by Collins, — a poet who had, indeed, a curious ear, as well as an exquisite taste in versification; but both were of so peculiar a kind, that neither the music of his numbers, nor the beauty, delicacy, and almost unearthly character of his imagery are always agreeable. The very structure of the stanza, in his "Ode to Evening," is so mechanical to the eye, — two long lines followed by two short ones, — that a presentiment (like an instinctive judgment in physiognomy) instantly occurs, that both thought and language must be fettered in a shape so mathematical, — wanting even the hieroglyphic recommendation of the metrical hatchets, wings, altars, and other exploded puerilities of the later Greek epigrammatists, and the elder English rhymers. Collins's Ode itself is a precious specimen of mosaic work, in which the pictures are set with painful and

consummate skill, but have a hard and cold effect, beyond the usual enamel of his style.

But Milton, the mighty Milton, has pronounced against rhyme, and in favour of blank verse, in the preamble to "Paradise Lost," — either written by himself, or published with his express sanction: — "The measure is English heroic verse, without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek, and Virgil in Latin; rhyme being no necessary adjunct, or true ornament, of poem or good verse, in larger works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre; graced, indeed, since, by the use of some famous modern poets, carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hinderance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse, than else they would have expressed them. Not without cause, therefore, some, both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note, have rejected rhyme, both in larger and in shorter works; as have also, long since, our best English tragedies; as a thing of itself, to all judicious ears, trivial and of no true musical delight, which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse to another; not in the jingling sound of like endings, — a fault studiously avoided by the learned ancients, both in poetry and all good oratory. This neglect, then, of rhyme, so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so, perhaps, to vulgar readers, that it is rather to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of

*ancient liberty recovered* to heroic poem, from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming."

Without entering into any argument on the question, dogmatically as the law is here laid down, we may at once appeal to Spenser, Dryden, Pope, and many of our contemporaries, to exonerate rhyme from the indignity cast upon it; though we are, at the same time, willing to allow that Shakspeare, Milton, Thomson, Young, and others have established for blank verse all the high claims (except exclusiveness) asserted here. Milton himself was not happy in the management of rhyme; yet it cannot be admitted that "Comus," "Samson Agonistes," or "Paradise Lost," outshine, either in sublime embellishment, or "colours dipt in heaven," the joyous images, the mournful beauty, and the rapt abstractions of "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," and "Lycidas;" though the versification (through no fault of the rhyme) in many passages of these is crabbed in construction, and, from the jolting transitions, ungrateful to the ear, as well as difficult to follow. But since two sovereign authorities, Milton and Pope, are at variance on this point, it may perhaps be best decided by saying, that he who can employ rhyme like the one, or blank verse like the other, may safely prefer that in which he himself excels.

### *Poetic Phraseology.*

But whatever the form, the theme, or the compass of a poem, the diction is so essential to excellence and to success, that no other merit will compensate for

meanness, extravagance, or deficiency here. Where there is grace, vigour, harmony of expression, the field is more than half won; and, presuming that it was worth winning, the victory is sure to him who has, with a fair proportion of other requisites, the arbitrary command of these. For the object of the poet is, — not merely to convey information of facts, unravel a well-tangled plot, refute error, or establish truth by argument, nor yet to move the passions and delight the fancy by pathos and imagery, — *then*, like the historian, the novelist, or the logician, leave the memory of the reader to retain, as it may, an abstract of the whole that has been communicated: — no; but it is the poet's purpose to identify in the reader's mind the things themselves with the very phrases, words, syllables, sounds through which they were communicated; because therein so much resides the enchantment of pure song, that a very slight alteration may quite change the character both of the ideas themselves and the impression which they are calculated to make in the original terms.

So evanescent is poetical spirit, so inconvertible poetic diction, that though the latter, undisturbed, may rival the firmament in durability, and like the firmament transmit the glories inlaid in it from generation to generation, — yet so frail and fugitive is the vehicle, that, unsettle but a word, it breaks like a bubble, and the unimprisoned spirit is gone. Let us put this to the test. Ariel, the delicate sprite, the finest creation of the finest fancy that ever peopled air, earth, and ocean with new tribes of beautiful or terrible beings; — that "bodied forth the shapes of

things" unknown, and gave "to airy nothings a local habitation and a name," — Ariel, the loveliest offspring of Shakspeare's genius, on the shore of "the Enchanted Island," sings this grotesque air, in the hearing, but not in sight, of Ferdinand, who believes his father to have been drowned in "the Tempest," from which the drama takes its name.

> "Full fathom five thy father lies;
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
> Nothing in him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.
> Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
> Hark! now I hear them — ding-dong, bell."

I remark not on the sea-nymphs ringing the knell of the dead, nor on the conversion of bones into coral, and eyes into pearl, — but I earnestly call attention to the three lines which so indefinitely, yet picturesquely, allude to the mysterious process by which these transmutations were effected: —

> "Nothing in him that doth fade,
> But doth *suffer a sea-change*
> Into something *rich and strange*."

He can have neither poetic ear nor poetic feeling who is not affected — he knows not how, and cares not wherefore — by the phrase "*suffer a sea-change*," or the collocation of epithets which follows, "*into something rich and strange*." I will not attempt, by microscopic criticism, to point out the curiosity and felicity of these terms; but, by substituting for them

words which, according to dictionary authority, are perfectly synonymous, every body will perceive that the poetry has escaped, and the *residuum* is flat prose. I lay no stress on the metre of the original (though the slow movement has in it an undescribable pathos), it will therefore be no disparagement to my translation, that it is not given in verse, which, indeed, has been avoided, for the purpose of securing a more rigidly literal meaning.

> " There's nothing in him that *decays*,
> But *undergoes an alteration from the water*
> Into something *valuable and uncommon*."
>
> " Nothing in him that *doth fade*,
> But doth *suffer a sea-change*
> Into something *rich and strange*."
> *Tempest*, Act I. Scene 2.

Here we have a perfect illustration of the difference between what is poetical and what is prosaic, in the same things. Here, also, is proof of that quality in poetic language which has power to " change — into something rich and strange," whatever is subjected to it; for, as the sea is represented to convert relics of mortality into rare and precious substances — pearls, amber and coral, which it throws upon the beach from treasures of darkness elaborated in its womb — so, from the unsounded depths of invention, the poet brings up, in new forms, old images and ideas, as different from what they were when received into his mind, as bodies, when buried in the ocean, were from what they became after they had " *suffered*," that —

——" sea-change
Into something rich and strange;"

of which we have now heard enough.

It may be observed in this place, that the far greater difficulty of translation from a foreign tongue into a vernacular one, may be appreciated by the comparative hopelessness of attempting to translate *out* of our own *into* our own, such passages as the foregoing, how accurately soever the sense may be given in terms similar, but not the same as those wherein the poet had bound it, — as with the girdle of Florimel, which none but she for whom it was made could wear, and which, among crowds of false claimants, identified the true owner by fitting her alone. It is remarkable, also, that the simplest thoughts, in the simplest words — those which translate themselves at first sight — are the least capable of being transfused with effect into any other words than those in which the original authors arrayed them; perhaps for this reason, that the sentiments themselves would never have been expressed at all but for the felicity of phrase, which the idioms of the poet's own language, without searching, supplied; these, indeed, may be elegantly paraphrased, but seldom literally rendered without irreparable deficiency of force. It will not be questioned that the feelings so exquisitely uttered in the following lines of Catullus, might not, with equal fervency and tenderness, be breathed forth in British verse, by a traveller long detained, and late arriving at his happy home. But an air and cast as entirely different must be given to the whole, as the atmosphere

and aspect of things around the *lares* of a Roman villa must have differed from the warm comforts of an Englishman's fireside.

> " O quid solutis est beatius curis,
> Cum mens onus reponit, ac peregrino
> Labore fessi venimus larem ad nostrum,
> Desideratoque acquiescimus lecto !"

How much even these sweet lines have been excelled, on a similar theme, in the language of our own land, every one must feel, who can compare the pure egotism of Catullus with the nobler sympathies of Coleridge : —

> " And now, belovèd Stowey ! I behold
> Thy church-tower, and, methinks, the four huge elms,
> Clustering, which mark the mansion of my friend ;
> And close *behind* them, *hidden from my view,*
> Is my own lowly cottage, *where my babe,*
> *And my babe's mother dwell in peace !* — with light
> And *quicken'd* footsteps thitherward I tread."
> *Fears in Solitude.*

### *Variety of Style.*

Diction in poetry, though employed expressly for the purpose of setting off the writer's thoughts in the most advantageous light, according to their character and the nature of the subject — but so as *always to please*, directly or indirectly, instantaneously or on reflection — diction, we observe, is capable of every variety of style, from the simplest to the most adorned ; from the most sprightly and conversational to the most sublime and severe. It is the practice of vulgar

versifiers, and also of many well-bred ones — nay, even of learned clerks, for academical poetry is peculiarly obnoxious to this censure — to labour their diction into stiff and stately, or vapid and affected unintelligibility, by means of inverted syntax, erudite terms, and all the pedantry of circumlocution; presuming, that it must of course approach so much the nearer to verse as it is further removed from prose. The very contrary is the fact; the best verse most nearly resembles the best prose in the plainness of the words employed, the natural construction of the sentences, and the easy intelligence of the whole, where nothing is wanting, nothing superfluous, nothing out of place, out of season, or out of proportion; in short, where nothing is singular for the sake of singularity, or out of the ordinary course, except for extraordinary purposes. Hobbes of Malmsbury, in the preface to his Version of Homer, has a beautiful thought and comparison on this subject: — "The order of words, when placed as they ought to be, carries a light before it, whereby a man may foresee the length of his period; as a torch in the night showeth a man the stops and unevenness of his way."

The theories of Mr. Wordsworth and the late Dr. Darwin deserve consideration here.

### *Mr. Wordsworth's Theory of Poetic Diction.*

Among living authors, not one has shown greater command of diction than Mr. Wordsworth; suiting his style to his subjects with consummate address,

though sometimes with unhappy effect, from the difficulty, not to say the impossibility, of making general readers partakers, by direct sympathy, with his peculiar experiences and imaginings, — that is, see with his eyes, hear with his ears, feel with his heart, and think with his mind, — possess them wholly with his own spirit, or for the time being absorb each of them into himself.

In an age of poetical innovations, Mr. Wordsworth has undoubtedly been one of the boldest and most successful adventurers. In the preface to his "Lyrical Ballads," — casting away at once, and entirely, all the splendid artifices of style, invented in the earliest ages of the fathers of poetry, and perpetuated among all classes of their successors, he avowed that "his principal object was, to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate and describe them throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and at the same time to throw upon them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting, by tracing in them truly, though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature, chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement."

Now, however the poet's ingenuity in the advancement and vindication of his theory of phraseology may deserve commendation, and however just the theory may be, so far as his system would restrict the multitude of epithets and expletives which often

render verse too heavy for endurance, — we may reasonably protest against the unqualified rejection of those graces of diction (suitable to the elevation of enthusiastic thoughts equally above ordinary discourse and ordinary capacities), which essentially distinguish poetry from prose, and have been sanctioned by the successful usage of bards in every age and nation, civilised or barbarous, on which the light of song hath risen with its quickening, ennobling, and ameliorating influences. In dramatic works, assuredly, the writer, through all his characters, should speak the truth of living nature; the language of the strong passions should be stern, abrupt, sententious, and sublime; that of the gentler affections, ardent, flowing, figurative, and beautifully redundant; while, in both instances, every colour of expression, every form of thought which appeals to the imagination only, and touches not the heart, nor adds to the positive interest of the piece, should be rigorously proscribed. But in narrative, descriptive, and ethic poetry, I know no law of nature, and I will acknowledge none of art, that forbids Genius to speak his mother tongue, — a language (a dialect rather, of every distinct language) which, in sound and structure, as well as in character and sentiment, exalts itself far above any models of common speech; and yet, in simplicity, freedom, and intelligibility, according to the subject, equals the poorest and least ornamented prose.

Mr. Wordsworth allows a poet to be a person "of more than usual organic sensibility;" and declares, that "he must have thought long, to produce

poems to which any value can be attached." With these admissions, we may fearlessly assert, that a poet — one who is really such — is no ordinary man; nor are his compositions the prompt and spontaneous expressions of his own every-day feelings. No; they are the most hidden ideas of his soul, discovered in his happiest moments, and apparelled in his selectest language. Will such a being, then, array the most pure, sublime, and perfect conceptions of his superior mind, in its highest fervour, only with "the real language of men in a state of vivid excitement?" Compare the lofty narratives of Milton, the luxuriant descriptions of Thomson, the solemn musings of Young; nay, even the soliloquies, and not unfrequently the dialogues, of Shakspeare, in which characters and passions are portrayed with unparalleled force and feeling — compare these with "the real language of men in a state of vivid excitement," on the very same subjects, or in precisely the same situations, however animated, interested, or stimulated they may be. The fact is, that poetical sensibility will, on all occasions — except in the bold, brief, instinctive expression of the highest degree of agony or rapture — suggest language more lively, affecting, and fervent, yet not a whit less natural, than passion itself can inspire in minds less tremblingly alive to every touch of pain or pleasure. Hence the delight communicated by poetry is, in general, more intensely transporting than any that could be derived from the unassisted contemplation of the objects themselves, which are presented to us by the magic of the author's art. Of that art his

language is the master-secret; and by this charm he transfuses into frigid imaginations his warmer feelings, and into dull minds his brighter views, on subjects and of things which might otherwise only indifferently affect them in nature and reality.

Mr. Wordsworth himself, though not a popular writer — nor one who ever can be, in the popular sense of the phrase, till the boasted march of intellect has made much more way than it is likely to do for half a century to come; — Mr. Wordsworth himself has established a reputation of the proudest rank upon the surest basis — the admiration of the most intellectual class of readers, who can distinguish what is exquisite from what is puerile, what is grand from what is obscure, and what is imaginative from what is merely fanciful, in his own multifarious productions. But how has he accomplished this? Certainly not by limiting his practice within his theory. He possesses as much as any man living the power of awakening unknown and ineffable emotions in the bosoms of his fellow-creatures; and he has exercised this power much oftener than that smaller craft of fashioning "Lyrical Ballads" and Tales, of which mean men are the actors, and their peculiarities the themes of verse, in phraseology such as they might be supposed to employ, if, instead of being taught to speak in rude prose from their infancy, they had

—— "lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came."

His "Cumberland Beggar," "Tintern Abbey," and "Lines on the Naming of Places," unpromising as the subjects might appear at first sight, with many

other of his profound and curious speculations, have taught us new sympathies, the existence of which in human nature had scarcely been intimated by any poet before him. In these his most successful efforts he has attired, in diction of the most transcendent beauty, thoughts the most recondite, and imaginations the most subtle. Thus: —

—— " I have learn'd
To look on Nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing, oftentimes,
The still, sad music of humanity;
Not harsh and grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; — a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is — the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, — and *in* the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

Again, —

—— " Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee, in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee; and in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure — when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or pain, or fear, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me!"

This is no more the language than these are the thoughts of men in general "in a state of excitement:" language more exquisitely elaborate, and thoughts more patiently worked out of the very marble of the mind, are rarely, indeed, to be met with either in prose or rhyme. For such tales as "Andrew Jones," "The Last of the Flock," "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," &c., the real language of men may be employed with pleasing effect; but when our poet would "present *ordinary* things in an *unusual* way," he is compelled to resort to gorgeous, figurative, and amplifying terms, and avail himself of the most daring licences of poetic diction. Thus: —

"The *winds*, that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gather'd now, *like sleeping flowers*."

"It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy *time* is quiet as *a nun*,
*Breathless with adoration!*"

"*Flowers laugh* before thee in their beds,
And *fragrance* in thy footing *treads*."

"*The cataracts blow their trumpets* from the steep,
The *winds* come o'er us from *the fields of sleep*."

I need not insist more on the necessity of using, in poetry, a language different from, and superior to, "the real language of men," even under the strongest excitement, since our author himself is so often compelled, nay, rather chooses voluntarily, to employ it for the expression of ideas which without it would be incommunicable. One instance of the happy use of the simplest language by Mr. Wordsworth must

be given, in justice to him. The poem of the "Old Cumberland Beggar" is, perhaps, the master-piece of his early volumes. In this we have the description of an ancient parish pensioner, not receiving pay, but collecting doles from the friendly cottagers as well as the wealthier inhabitants in his daily rounds; welcomed every where, and every where relieved, — a harmless, helpless, quiet-paced, and quiet-tongued old man, whose presence is a blessing to the neighbourhood, by making the humblest, as well as the highest, feel how good it is to *do* good. For

> —"Man is dear to man; the poorest poor
> Long for some moments, in a weary life,
> When they can know and feel, that they have been,
> Themselves, the fathers and the dealers out
> Of some small blessings — have been kind to such
> As needed kindness; — for *this* single cause,
> That we have all of us a human heart.
>
> "Such pleasure is to one kind being known,
> My neighbour, when, with punctual care, each week,
> Duly as Friday comes, *though press'd herself*
> By her own wants, she, from her store of meal,
> Takes one *unsparing* handful for the scrip
> Of this old mendicant; and, from her door,
> Returning with exhilarated heart,
> Sits by her fire, and builds her hopes in heaven."

### *Dr. Darwin's Theory of Poetic Style.*

The late Dr. Darwin, a poet of very different cast from Mr. Wordsworth, tells us, that the essential difference between prose and poetry consists, not solely in the melody or measure of language, because

some prose has melody and even measure; nor in the sublimity, beauty, or novelty of the sentiments, because, as he asserts, sublime sentiments are sometimes better expressed in prose. Of this he gives an example from one of Shakspeare's historical plays: — "When Warwick is left wounded on the field after the loss of the battle, and his friend says to him, 'Oh! could you but fly!' what can be more sublime than his answer, 'Why then I would *not* fly!' No measure of verse could add dignity to this sentiment." — Without disputing his position, I answer that the words are verse already. I know not how they stand in the original; but placing the interjection "Oh!" as the closing syllable of a line, and laying the natural emphasis on the *verb negative*, and not merely on the *sign* of negation, we have a perfect heroic verse.

"Oh!
Could you but *fly!* —
Why then I *would not* fly!"

The Doctor continues: — "In what, then, consists the essential difference between poetry and prose? Next to the measure of the language, the principal distinction appears to be this: that poetry admits of but few words expressive of very abstracted ideas; whereas prose abounds with them. And as our ideas derived from visible objects are more distinct than those derived from the objects of our other senses, the words expressive of these ideas belonging to vision make up the principal part of poetic language; that is, the poet writes principally to the eye, the

prose-writer uses more abstracted terms. Mr. Pope has written a bad verse in the 'Windsor Forest:'—

'And Kennet swift, for silver eels *renown'd.*'

The word 'renown'd' does not present a visible object to the mind, and is thence prosaic. But change the line thus: —

And Kennet swift, where silver graylings *play,*

and it becomes poetry; because the scenery is then brought before the eye. This may be done in prose; so it is more agreeable to read in Mr. Gibbon's History, 'Germany was at that time *overshadowed* with extensive forests,' than that Germany was at that time *full* of extensive forests. But when this mode of expression occurs too frequently, the prose approaches to poetry; and in grave works, where we expect to be instructed rather than amused, it becomes tedious and impertinent."

Thus far Dr. Darwin. I reply:—this is arguing completely in a circle. "Why then I *would not* fly" is undoubtedly *verse* by the *measure*, and *poetry* by the *sublimity* of the sentiment; while, without the variation of a syllable, and simply reading it according to the prosaic accents, it is *prose.*

"Oh! could you but *fly!* — Why then I would *not* fly!"

It follows, that thoughts of this character are common alike to prose and verse, and may be expressed in either. If Dr. Darwin's criticism excludes the phrase "for silver eels *renown'd,*" from poetry, it proves too much, for then the poet must not give the

eels at all that lie in the mud. He might, indeed, represent a fishwife stripping the skin from the writhing creature, but he could not even allude to their luxurious sloth in the slimy ooze, where they cannot be watched. This may be called quibbling; but it must be admitted, that the epithet "silver" gives an image to the eye, which sufficiently vindicates the poetry of the line against the prosaic participle "renown'd;" while the latter conveys an idea which no object of vision whatever could imply. Is the poet, then, to be precluded from celebrating the peculiar pre-eminence of the river Kennet for its peculiar fish, because the word that designates its superiority is an abstract term? "Germany was, at that time, *overshadowed* with extensive forests!" The Doctor acknowledges that the poetic verb here used animates the prose; why then may not abstract terms (though in themselves prosaic) occasionally be employed to temper the ardour of verse, as snow in hot climates, sprinkled over the wine-cup, makes the draught more delicious? The whole range of language and of thought must be conceded to writers of both kinds; and it depends upon their own taste, at their own peril, to mingle, discreetly or otherwise, with the staple of their diction, terms which are conventionally understood to belong to poetry and prose, in precisely inverse proportions.

Dr. Darwin has splendidly exemplified the effects of his own theory, which certainly includes much truth, but not the whole truth. Endued with a fancy peculiarly formed for picture-poetry, he has limited verse almost within the compass of designing

and modelling with visible colours and palpable substances. Even in this poetic painting, he seldom goes beyond the brilliant minuteness of the Dutch school of artists, while his groups are the extreme reverse of theirs, being rigidly classical. His productions are undistinguished by either sentiment or pathos. He presents nothing but pageants to the eye, and leaves next to nothing to the imagination; every point and object being made out in noonday clearness, where the sun is nearly vertical, and the shadow most contracted. He never touches the heart, nor awakens social, tender, or playful emotions. His whole "Botanic Garden" might be sculptured in friezes, painted in enamel, or manufactured in Wedgwood ware. "The Loves of the Plants" consist of a series of metamorphoses, all of the same kind,—plants personified, having the passions of animals, or rather such passions as animals might be supposed to have, if, instead of warm blood, cool vegetable juices circulated through their veins; so that, though every lady-flower has from one to twenty beaux, all flighted and favoured in turn, the wooings and the weddings are so scrupulously Linnæan, that no human affection is ever concerned in the matter. What velvet painting can be more exquisite than the following lines, in which the various insects are touched to the very life?—

"Stay thy soft murmuring waters, gentle rill;
Hush, whispering winds; ye rustling leaves, be still;
Rest, silver butterflies, your quivering wings;
Alight, ye beetles, from your airy rings;

Ye painted moths, your gold-eyed plumage furl,
Bow your wide horns, your spiral trunks uncurl;
Glitter, ye glow-worms, on your mossy beds;
Descend, ye spiders, on your lengthen'd threads;
Slide here, ye horned snails, with varnish'd shells;
Ye bee-nymphs, listen in your waxen cells."

In such descriptions Darwin excels, and his theory is triumphant; but to prove it of universal application, it must be put to a higher test. In the third canto of the "Botanic Garden," Part II., there is a fine scene—a lady, from the "wood-crowned height" of Minden, overlooking the battle in which her husband is engaged. As the conflict thickens, she watches his banner shifting from hill to hill, and when the enemy is at length beaten from every post,

"Near and more near the intrepid beauty press'd,
Saw through the driving smoke his dancing crest;
Saw on his helm, her virgin hands inwove,
Bright stars of gold, and mystic knots of love;
Heard the exulting shout, 'They run, they run!'
'Great God!' she cried, 'he 's safe, the battle 's won!'
— A ball now hisses through the airy tides,
(Some fury wing'd it, and some demon guides,)
Parts her fine locks her graceful head that deck,
Wounds her fair ear, and sinks into her neck;
The red stream issuing from her azure veins,
Dyes her white veil, her ivory bosom stains!"

Every syllable here is addressed to the eye; there is not a word for the heart; the poet himself might have been the bullet that shot the lady, so insensible is he of the horror of the deed. Or he might have been a surgeon, deposing before a coroner's inquest

over the body, under what circumstances said lady came to her death, so anatomically correct is the process of the wound laid down; yet, even in that case, he appears a *petit-maître* of the scalpel, so delicately does he talk about — mark well the epithets! — the "*fine* locks," the "*graceful* head," the "*fair* ear," the "neck," the "*red* stream," the "*azure* veins," the "*white* veil," and the "*ivory* bosom;" — a perfect inventory of the lady's charms; without a sigh, a tear, or the wink of an eyelid, over the matron slain between her two children, the wife struck dead in the presence of her husband returning victorious from battle to her embrace. This may be poetry, but it is not nature; and such, in every instance, more or less, is the poetry which is formed according to artificial rules.

I have not time to discuss the sequel, — the lady's last words: they are equally out of character. Those who have the opportunity may compare the death-scene (much to the advantage of the living author) with that of Gertrude of Wyoming, which may have been suggested (very remotely and quite unconsciously) by Darwin's Eliza. — Sir Walter Scott excels in painting battle pieces, as overseen by some interested spectator. Eliza at Minden is circumstanced so nearly like Clara at Flodden, that the mighty Minstrel of the North may possibly have caught the idea of the latter from the Lichfield Botanist; but, oh! how has he triumphed!

### *Poetic Licences and Dialects.*

The limits of these papers will not allow us to go particularly into the subject of poetic licences, which belong to this part of our subject. It is, therefore, only necessary to remark, that in every language in which metre has been framed (even in the Hebrew, though there it cannot be so accurately traced,) minstrels have taken liberties with the vernacular idiom, verbal, grammatical, and constructive; which, while they would be barbarous in speech, are yet graceful in song.

The Greeks had the range of all their native dialects for ornamental use, as well as the choice of one for the staple of their verse. The delicate sprinkling of antiquated words over Virgil's pure and high latinity, gives an unspeakable charm to an occasional line; and Lucretius lays more powerful hold upon the imagination itself by this spell, than his cold philosophical theme, in its didactic passages, could have achieved without the aid of something so exquisitely venerable.

The modern Italians have a poetic dialect so distinct from that of prose, that it may be said of the twain that they are neither the same, nor yet unlike, as sisters well may be." What is remarkable in this musical speech (every sentence of which might be delivered in *recitativo*), and which is so jealous of the slightest harshness, that every consonant is guarded by a vowel, —is the circumstance, that those very vowels which give fulness and volubility to

prose, are frequently excluded to enrich and ennoble verse with the strength of consonants.

French metre admits peculiar privileges in scanning, and requires certain reciprocities in rhyming (the alternation of what are called masculine and feminine endings), which sufficiently distinguish it from other compositions, written or spoken. But the delicacies of verse in this subtle and volatile tongue, are with such difficulty apprehended by foreigners, that few regard them otherwise than as real insipidities. Take a specimen from Boileau:—

> " Sophocle enfin, donnant l'essor à son génie,
> Accrut encore la pompe, augmenta l'harmonie;
> Intéressa le Chœur dans toute l'action,
> De vers trop rabotteux polit l'expression;
> Lui donna chez les Grecs cette hauteur divine,
> Où jamais n'atteignit la foiblesse Latine."
>
> *L'Art poëtique*, Chant iii.

The rhymes of the first two couplets are so utterly French, that an English tongue can scarcely touch or an English ear arrest them; the measure, too, is equally serpentine and slippery, being no sooner perceived in one undulation of cadence than, when you think yourself sure of catching it, it lapses into another. The last couplet, alone, is easily legible and intelligible to strangers in rhyme and accentuation. Herein, probably, I betray my own ignorance, but I believe that my countrymen in general (familiar as bad French has become in their mouths, and evasive as good is to their ears,) would bear me out in the statement, as matter of fact in respect to themselves.

In Spanish there are niceties of rhythm, rhyme,

and corresponding terminations, neither quite rhyme nor altogether blank, which render that language one of the most pliant and effective for the utterance of poetic conceptions in almost every imaginable form of metre. No wonder that, with such plastic materials, Lopez de Vega poured forth his millions of lines as readily as melted metal may be run into all manner of moulds.

The German, if it have not equal grace with some of its contemporaries of classical descent, has more comprehensiveness, and can express with enviable facility the different cadences of quantity and of accent, with either rhyme or blank endings.

Our English poetry has not assumed any extraordinary prerogative in modifying words to meet its exigences, or the caprices of its professors. One only of the latter, Spenser, has dared to frame an almost arbitrary vocabulary, varying the diction of his "Faerie Queene" from that of his "Shepheard's Calender," and again in his minor pieces employing a dialect between the ruggedness of the latter, and the romantic stateliness of the former. But Spenser was one of the masters of the lyre, and if he lengthened and abridged the strings, or added to their number, according to his fancy, it was to produce harmony otherwise unattainable, and to give others, less adventurous than he, scope as well as courage to follow him into the heights and depths of our noble language, which has never yet, perhaps, been essayed through the whole compass of its scale. To suit the rhyme, the cadence, the length or the euphony of his lines, he adopted old words, or new, added or curtailed

syllables, varied terminations, violated syntax, and wrote the larger portion of his imperishable, though for ever unpopular (since his own age), compositions in what, without consummate art and management, would have very much resembled the "Babylonish Dialect" of Butler's hero,—

> "A party-colour'd dress
> Of patcht and pie-ball'd languages;
> But when he pleased to show 't, his speech
> In loftiness of sound was rich."

His ninth eclogue begins thus:—

HOBBINOL.

> "Diggon Davie! I bid her good day;
> Or Diggon her is, or I mis-say.

DIGGON.

> Her *was* her, while it was day-light,
> But nowe her is a most wretched wight;
> For day that was is wightly past,
> And now at earst the dirke night doth haste."

Surely this is neither Welsh nor English; nothing in Chaucer is more uncouth. I need not quote from the "Faerie Queene," having given a stanza in a former paper. The quaint yet sweet, the homely yet venerable style in which it is composed, has become well known; less, indeed, from the original than from the numerous imitations of it, especially Thomson's "Castle of Indolence;" a structure of genuine talent, certainly not piled when that "bard, more fat than bard beseems," was, where he delighted to be, on the spot itself, though so witchingly framed for voluptuous

ease, that the reader is ready to lie down under its influence, — not, however, to sleep.

### *Scottish Verse.*

The language (shall I call it?) of our northern neighbours, in which so much popular poetry has been preserved, and so much more compiled of late years, has the same peculiar character as Spenser's; namely, that it is fluctuating, not fixed; a conventional, not an actual, language. Its basis was, undoubtedly, a national dialect now nearly obsolete; but its superstructure consists of vulgar idioms, and its embellishments of pure English phrases. Hence, as it is written (for I confine these strictures to its *written* forms), this admired "*Scotch*" is an arbitrary system of terms, only remotely akin; and its force and elegance depend principally on the skill with which each particular author combines its constituent parts, to make a *common chord* of its *triple* tones. That style, therefore, may, in general, be pronounced the most harmonious and perfect, in which the national dialect is the *key-note*, while the vulgar and the English (like the *third* and *fifth* in music) are subordinate. This flexible and untameable tongue — which the Doric muse, when she fled from Greece, might have invented for herself, while learning the old Erse, among the mountains and glens of Caledonia, — has also a *minor* scale, of touching tenderness, as well as a *major*, of spirit-stirring strength.

Burns, "the glory" of his country, or "the

shame," as he worthily or ignominiously exercised his vein of versatile genius, disdained to confine his strains to any peculiar accordance of these: but, according to the theme, ran through the whole vernacular diapason, as well as the *falsetto* English, in which his feebler pieces are composed. Of the latter, it would be wasting time to offer an example, because a longer quotation than convenient might be required, to prove a point of little significance. Three specimens, however, to show the gradations, of what is vulgarly called the *Scotch* dialect, employed by him, may be expedient and acceptable, as they will be quite in place, while we are considering poetic diction, and poetic licence. Brief though they be, these extracts from long poems, quite distinct from each other, in their general diction, will at once discover to the unsuspecting admirers of north country song, what prodigious advantages its minstrels possess over their "southron" brethren, who are confined to sheer English, and dare not touch a provincial accent with the tip of their tongue, on pain of excommunication from classic society. The boundless resources enjoyed by the former, to select and link together words and phrases at will, high or low, antique or new-fangled, polished or barbarian,—not only prepossess the reader in favour of every real beauty struck out by such grotesque combinations, and make him eagerly relish it, but they likewise (unconsciously to himself) influence his judgment, to make large allowance for frequent defects and excesses, as necessary, and not offensive ingredients,

in a style released from all obligations to law and precedent.

I begin with the rudest, which I scarcely can hope to read intelligibly in English ears, so unskilled am I in the accents of my mother tongue. The "Farmer's New Year's Morning Salutation to his auld Mare Maggie" is written in such uncouth strains as these:

"A guid new-year, I wish thee, Maggie!
Hae! there 's a ripp [1] to thy auld baggie;
Tho' thou 's howe-backit [2] now, and knaggie,
I've seen the day,
Thou could hae gaen like onie staggie
Out-owre the lay."

* * * * *
* * * * *

"When first I gaed to woo my Jenny,
Ye then was trottin wi' your minnie: [3]
Tho' ye was tricklie, slee and funnie,
Ye ne'er was donsie; [4]
But hamely, tawie [5], quiet, an' cannie, [6]
An' unco sonsie. [7]

* * * * *
* * * * *

"Thou never braindg't [8], an' fetcht [9], an' fliskit; [10]
But thy auld tail thou wad hae whiskit,
An' spread abreed thy weel-fill'd brisket,
Wi' pith and pow'r,
Till sprittie knowes [12] wad rair't and risket,
An' slippet owre." [13]

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[1] A handful of unthrashed corn. [2] Hump-backed and bare-boned. [3] Dam (Mother). [4] Mischievous. [5] Easily handled. [6] Gentle. [7] Lively. [8] Stumbled. [9] Pulled hard. [10] Fretted. [11] Spread abroad thy chest. [12] Brushwood hillocks. [13] Crashed, uprooted and thrown down.

In the "Advice to a Young Friend," we have nearly the national Scotch, as it is used among persons of the middle rank;—most characteristically inculcating, among others, this shrewd lesson:—

"Aye free, aff han', your story tell,
When wi' a bosom-crony;
But still keep something to yoursel'
Ye scarcely tell to ony:
Conceal yourself as weel 's ye can
Fra' critical dissection,
But keek * thro' every other man
With sharpen'd sly inspection."

In "the Cottar's Saturday Night," the poet has so varied his dialect that there are scarcely two consecutive stanzas written according to the same model. An hour of winter evening music on the Æolian harp, when all the winds are on the wing, would hardly be more wild, and sweet, and stern, and changeable than the series. Some of the strains are as purely English as the author could reach; others so racily Scottish as often to require a glossary; while in a third class the two are so enchantingly combined, that no poetic diction can excel the pathos and sublimity, blended with beauty and homeliness, that equally mark them. Of the latter description is the following:—

"The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle †, form a circle wide;
The Sire turns o'er, wi' patriarchal grace,
The big *ha-Bible*, ance his Father's pride:

* Peep. † Fire.

His bonnet reverently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets * wearing thin an' bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales † a portion with judicious care:
And, 'Let us worship God!' he says, with solemn air."

The latitudinarianism of the Scottish dialect in rhyming, jingling, or merely alliterative vowel sounds, in dissonant words at the end of lines, may be thus exemplified:—

"O pale, pale now, those rosy lips,
I aft hae kiss'd sae fondly;
And closed for aye the sparkling glance,
That dwelt on me sae kindly.
And mouldering now, in silent dust,
That heart that lo'ed me dearly;
But still within my bosom's core,
Shall live my Highland Mary!"

*Fondly* and *kindly*,—*dearly* and *Mary* could never be endured as rhymes on this side of the Tweed; but yet the slight sprinkling of Scottish in the context, with the overpowering tenderness of the sentiments themselves, render these discords tolerable, or rather compel them to be forgotten in such association.

Finally, this composite dialect adds exquisite quaintness to humorous, and a simple grace to ordinary forms of speech, while it renders grand and terrific imagery more striking and dreadful. It is hardly a language of this world in the witching scene in "Tam

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* Grey side-locks. † Chooses.

O'Shanter," that miracle of the muse of Burns, in which all his talents are brought into play, on a subject most gross and abominable, yet in the passage alluded to preternaturally awful and mysterious, so long as he maintains his gravity in describing the obscene and horrid rites of the "secret, black, and midnight hags," within the walls of Auld Kirk Alloway, Satan himself being bag-piper to their dancing.

> " Coffins stood round, like open presses,
> That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
> And, by some devilish cantrip-sleight,
> Each in his cauld hand held a light;
> By which heroic Tam was able
> To note upon the haly table,
> — A murderer's banes in gibbet-airns,
> Twa span-lang wee unchristen'd bairns,
> A thief new cutted frae a rape,
> *Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;*
> Five tomahawks wi' blude red-rusted,
> Five scymetars, wi' murder crusted;
> A garter which a babe had strangled;
> A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
> Wham his ain son o' life bereft,
> — *The grey hairs yet stack to the heft.*"
>
> * * * * *
>
> " Wi' mair o' horrible an' awfu',
> Which e'en to name wad be unlawfu'."

The elision of the final *l* in the last rhymes of this extract, is singularly expressive of the horror that clips the breath of the speaker, while he imagines himself the spectator of "deeds without a name." Such criticisms may seem frivolous to some incurious persons; but every poet at least will know how to

estimate the value of licences like these, to do what he pleases with words, and make words do what they are bidden. But with all these immunities, the writers of Scottish verse are so limited in their ranges of subjects, and the compass of their song, that their pieces must of necessity be brief, and their themes nearly confined to humour, pathos, and familiar description. A great work, like an epic poem, could not be achieved in so lawless a dialect.

### *Capabilities of Languages.*

Limited, however, as poetic licence may be in a severe and uncompromising language like ours, the man of original genius will never be at a loss to adapt its resources to his exigencies, and so to assimilate the medium of communication with the character of his own mind, as to give to his most recondite conceptions such perfect development, that no version in a foreign idiom shall equal in effect the sounds and syllables which he has selected for them. What indeed should the poet do, if he had not virtue in himself to mould according to his will the language in which his thoughts are to live? as the fish in the convoluted shell shapes its dwelling by the motion of its body within.

"Will you play upon this pipe?" says Hamlet to Guildenstern. — "I cannot, I know no touch of it, my Lord," replies the courtier. — "'Tis as easy as lying," retorts the satirical prince; "govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb; give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent

music: look ye, these are the stops." — "But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony; I have no skill," is the humble confession of the other. Thus the melodies of the pipe must be the result of the piper's employment of its capabilities, which each who tries will variously bring out. It is a small thing that the fiddle is a genuine Cremona, and the warranted workmanship of Straduarius; every hand that draws a bow across it will produce every note unlike every other performer, according to his skill in fingering, and the "music in his soul;" — from the crude scraping of "some blind crowder in the streets," to the tones of anguish or ecstasy which Paganini, with touches like the first beams of sunlight on the statue of Memnon, elicits from the strings; or extorts when *he* strikes and *they* shriek as though he were putting live sufferers to the sword.

What the pipe and the viol are to the minstrel, his native tongue is to the poet. The finest instruments are dumb till those harmonies are put into them, of which *they* can be no more than the passive conductors. Language, in like manner, is a dead letter, till the spirit within the poet himself breathes through it, gives it voice, and makes it audible to the very mind. The powers of any langauge, therefore, are put to proof just in proportion to the powers of the author himself who composes in it. Shakspeare, Milton, and Wordsworth, Burke, Johnson and Junius, among numberless others, have each done with our English what none ever did before him; and there are abundant capabilities in it yet undiscovered. What great master shall next bring a few more of them

forth with equal conspicuity? Nor need they be far sought; they lie along the highway of literature; they are the granite-materials of which the road is made. — Lord Byron affected the frequent use of quaint, obsolete, and outlandish terms; and by this artifice, no doubt, he occasionally rendered his style both gorgeous and venerable. But his chief strength lay in a despotic command over the most ordinary forms of speech. He has done more for *common words* than Dryden himself did; and the energy with which he employs them is the most remarkable, as well as the most exemplary, characteristic of his style in his best productions, — such as the third and fourth Cantos of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage."

Without any reference to the merits or faults of the following stanzas, they will strikingly exhibit the power of high pressure, which the noble writer could put in force to multiply thoughts with words, and so condense them, that scarcely one of the latter could be withdrawn, without extinguishing one of the former. — In the storm on the Lake of Geneva, he thus breaks out: —

"Sky, mountains, rivers, winds, lake, lightnings! — Ye,
With night, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul
To make these felt and feeling; — the far roll
Of your departing voices is the knoll
Of what in me is sleepless — if I rest.

* * * * *

"Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me — could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings strong or weak,
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,

Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe, — into *one* word
And that one word were *lightning*, I would speak! —
But as it is I live and die unheard,
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword."

I conclude with an admirable illustration of this ill-understood subject, by a critic of no ordinary tact, which may be found in an article on "Todd's Milton," in the Quarterly Review, No. xxxvi.:—

"Let us not hear a polished language blamed for the defects of those who know not how to put it forth. It must be wielded by the master before its true force can be known. The Philippics of Demosthenes were pronounced in the mother tongue of every one of his audience; but who among them could have answered him in a single sentence like his own? Who among them could have guessed what Greek could do, though they had spoken it all their lives, till they heard it from his lips? *The secret of using language, is to use it from a full mind.*"

# LECTURES ON POETRY.

## N° V.

### VARIOUS CLASSES OF POETRY.

### *Narrative Poetry.*

Lord Bacon distinguishes poetry under three heads: Narrative, Dramatic, and Parabolic. To these may be added a fourth, Miscellaneous, comprehending one half of the verse that is written, and which can hardly be said to come under any denomination less general. Without particular reference to these distinctions, I shall briefly notice several of the principal classes of poetry, according to the limits which must not here be exceeded.

Narrative poetry embraces all the varieties of metrical story-telling, from the lofty epic to the lowly ballad. In these (according to the licence of fiction) the author—knowing every thing that he chooses to know, and being privy to the inmost thoughts as well as the outward acts of his heroes — discloses to his reader (like one invisible being holding converse with another) the entire circumstances of all the

events, single or in series, which he feigns or borrows. He thus makes his fable, as it is called, more complete through all its bearings, than any series of facts can be rendered, from the necessary imperfection of human testimony, the difficulty of discovering by contingent evidence more than has been verbally recorded of any thing that is past, and the impossibility of ever recovering the memory of what has once been lost — absolutely lost. For example, — of the history of Rome, nothing more can be known at any future time, but what is extant at this hour in the relics of contemporary writers, or their successors, who have preserved what otherwise would have perished with the originals. Buried among the ruins of Herculaneum, or under the dust of centuries in monastic libraries, — documents containing intelligence, of which we are yet ignorant, may hereafter be brought to light; but that which is no longer registered on earth, though it may have decided the destinies of empires, is to us, in these later ages, the same as though it never had been. The quantity of error, conjecture, and misrepresentation, which abound in the early chronicles of all nations, and are not easily separable from those of the most enlightened periods, cause history to be, at best, a dubious authority to follow in its precedents for the conduct of either statesmen or philosophers.

Leo X. conceived the magnificent idea of forming a model of the city of Rome, as it stood in its glory, from a survey of the ruins of its palaces, temples, and amphitheatres, as they remained at his own day; — according to the style of each relic filling up the

elevation of the original structure. This task he committed to Raphael, who ardently undertook it, but died on the threshold of that renovated Rome; which thereafter fell into less reparable decay than its ancient prototype. Mr. Roscoe informs us, that the great artist presented a memorial to the Pontiff on this project, accompanied by a drawing of an entire edifice, completed according to the rules which he had laid down for the development of the whole.* What Raphael's memorial and specimen were to Rome under Augustus, history and its illustrations are to any given series of events; being only more or less imperfect in proportion as the dilapidated foundations, solitary columns, and mouldering walls of ancient edifices, furnish models and materials for raising upon them theoretical superstructures to represent what they *were*, but which in reality are but what they *might have been*. I would not disparage the most valuable inheritance bequeathed to us by our fathers in the chronicles and traditions of those periods in which they lived. But such is the task of him who sits down to compile the annals of any people; out of their ruins, he has to build their

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* Raphael, in this memorial, observes: — "Having been commissioned by your Holiness, to make a design of ancient Rome, so far as it can be discovered in what now remains, with all the edifices of which such ruins yet appear as may enable us infallibly to ascertain what they originally were, and to supply such parts as have been wholly destroyed by making them correspond with those that yet exist; — I have used every possible exertion, that I might give you full satisfaction, and convey a perfect idea on the subject."

monuments. And as "the poetical" of Greek and Roman architecture has alone survived, in fallen temples and palaces, while the mere "prose," in the masonry of vulgar dwellings, has been utterly obliterated, — so, in the most perfect history, wrecks of magnificence only are preserved; and of these the principal portions have been so disfigured by fable, or embellished by romance, that the lessons of Time (the slowest of teachers, and who ought to be the surest, did not his memory so much fail him,) are defective in main parts of the argument from default of unadulterated or unmutilated facts; so that the inferences, however wise and salutary, to be derived from what is presented as the fruit of experience, are proportionately unimpressive and unsatisfactory. But Time is rather the preceptor of *man*, his coeval, than of *men*, his offspring. His schools are communities, which he instructs not so much by details, as by the gradual evolution of great results out of the infinite multiplicity of small circumstances that make up the business of individual life. With him, therefore, a lesson which takes less than a century in the delivery, is scarcely intelligible; for the issue of a day may require an age to develope it. The battle of Waterloo in a few hours, not only put an end to the wars of the French Revolution, but was itself the first scene of a new drama in the theatre of Europe, which will probably employ the actors of many generations to carry on, before an equally decisive catastrophe shall again turn the current of history at a right angle (so to speak) from the course into which that victory of our countrymen diverted it.

Hence the lessons of poetic narrative may be rendered more perfect, as well as more interesting than those of the most authentic history, because the premises from which the former is to be drawn may be exactly fitted to the purpose of exemplifying and enforcing the instruction intended. "The Iliad," contained all that had been learned from the practice of war through all ages antecedent. In the "Gerusalemme Liberata" of Tasso are summed up all the glories and horrors of the crusades. In "Paradise Lost," we have the theological history of the world. At the same time, it would be affectation to assume, that the few unrivalled epic poems have been composed, primarily, for any other reason than because the themes appeared to the authors capable of exercising their genius, and displaying their powers of invention and embellishment to the highest advantage. The conceit of Bossu, that the great masters of antiquity first fixed upon a moral, and then sought a story to illustrate it, is as pure a fiction as any to be found in the Odyssey itself. Virgil's Æneid has been especially insisted on in proof of this pedantic hypothesis; and we have been gravely told, that "there are two distinct objects to be kept in view in the conduct of a narrative poem, the one *poetical*, the other *moral*; the poetical being the *fictitious* action, and the moral the *real* design of the poem. Thus Virgil wrote and felt like a *subject*, not like a *citizen*. The *real* design of his poem was to increase the veneration of the people for a master, whoever he might be, and to encourage, like Homer, the great system of military despotism." These are the notions of the republican

Joel Barlow, in his preface to the strangest epic composition ever issued from the press, — "the Columbiad." It is true, both to the honour and the shame of poets, that in following the impulse, we might say the instinct, of their genius, — when it has been possible to serve their country or their own interest, they have often availed themselves of the opportunity; but it is yet more obvious that poets write in the first place (if we may so express it), for the very love of the thing; and in the second, from the love of fame. Will any man on this side of the Atlantic believe that Virgil's "*real* object" in composing the Æneid, was "to increase the veneration of the people to a master?" Nay, would any man in his senses on either side of the Atlantic doubt that his "*real* object" was to immortalise his own name? and that, in choosing his theme, he suited it to the times and government under which he lived, because he judged that he should thus more immediately and effectually promote his own glory? Conscious of his powers, would Virgil have hazarded the reversion of renown that awaited him with posterity, for the favour of Augustus? No, not for the throne of Augustus. They know little of the character of poets of this class who thus judge of them. Had Virgil planned his Æneid as "a subject," he would never have executed it as a poet, for it is the spirit in which the offspring of imagination is conceived that becomes the life of it when produced into being.

The dogma of Warburton is equally gratuitous, that "the Iliad" being a moral, "the Æneid" a political, and the "Paradise Lost" a religious poem,

all improvement of the *Epopée* is at an end, since every subject fit for heroic verse may be considered in a moral, a political, or a religious point of view! If the three epics here named have indeed the three characteristics attributed to them, which may be doubted, — these are mere contingencies, or accidents of the stories respectively, and were very subordinate considerations with the poets themselves. Practical inferences might indeed be deduced from the most extravagant of the Metamorphoses of Ovid, but it was for the sake of the marvellous fable, not for the meagre moral, that one or another subject was chosen, and for the adorning of which that poet wearied, yet never exhausted, the resources of a fancy fertile beyond comparison in certain mechanical combinations of ideal imagery, as diverse and grotesque as the transmutations of bodies which they shadow forth.

### *Allegorical Poetry.*

Yet, sometimes interwoven with the epic narrative and sometimes employed alone in the parabolic form, there has ever been a favourite species of poetry, in which the moral was avowedly the foundation, and the fable the superstructure. Most of the mythological traditions of Greece and Rome were, in their origin, of this kind; but such is the caprice of public taste, or perhaps the perversity of human nature, that the further these compositions departed from their original character, the more pleasing and popular they became. At length the poetical features

alone were regarded, and the lessons inculcated were wilfully made as undecipherable as those which are at once preserved and hidden under the hieroglyphics of Egypt. The tales of chivalry and romance of the Italian poets were professedly of the same cast; but, in spite of the false pretences of the writers themselves (having the fear of the Inquisition before their eyes), the grave labours of their commentators to spiritualise the profligate pages of Ariosto, and wring out orthodox divinity from the purer fictions of Tasso, have succeeded no better than the ingenious experiments of the philosopher, who attempted to draw sunbeams from cucumbers.

The noblest allegorical poem in our own language, — indeed, the noblest allegorical poem in the world, — is Spenser's "Faerie Queene;" at the same time, it is probable, that if it had *not* been allegorical at all, it would have been a far more felicitous and attractive work of imagination. In all allegories of length we grow dull as the story advances, and feel very little anxiety about the conclusion, except for its own sake, *as* the conclusion. Beautiful and diversified as the most perfect of these "unsubstantial pageants" may be, few readers, when they lay one down, are sorry that it is finished; and most minds, in recalling the pleasure of its perusal, dwell upon those scenes that nearest resemble reality, and ruminate on the rest as half-recollected images of a wild and exhausting dream, from which they are not sorry at being awakened to ordinary sights and sounds, however entranced they may have been while the illusion lasted. This is the inevitable effect of allegories, — they never

leave the impression of truth behind. In noble fictions, where truth, though not told in the letter, is maintained in the spirit, it is far otherwise. We rise from the narrative of the death of Hector, and the visit of Priam by night to the tent of Achilles, as from reading historical facts; our feelings are precisely the same as they would have been, were those circumstances authentic. In Milton's wonderful poem, though our judgment is never deceived into a belief of their having actually taken place, the conversations between Adam and Eve, and their interview with Raphael, the affable archangel, have all the warmth of life within, and all the daylight of reality about them.

In avowed allegory we can rarely forget that the personages never did, and never could exist; nor that both personages and scenes represent something *else*, and not *themselves*. When we give over reading, all curiosity and interest cease; we can have no personal interest in such phantoms, and we suffer no regret when they are vanished; they came like shadows, and so they departed. If ever allegorical characters excite either sympathy or affection, it is when we lose the idea that they they *are* such; consequently, when the allegory itself is suspended with regard to them.

Again, in allegory, the mind naturally expects wonders in continual succession, and is greatly disappointed if they do not occur so frequently as to destroy their own effect,—defeat the very purpose for which wonders are wrought. Where all is marvellous, nothing is so. Besides, with unbounded licence to do any thing or every thing, there is no sphere of

invention so limited as this, to the most creative genius; the sources of mere fiction are soon exhausted, those of fact never. Hence there is a wearisome sameness and repulsive formality (like court etiquette) in most productions of this class. Who is not sick of queens and goddesses, in their palaces and temples, with their trains of attendants, their nymphs, and their worshippers, in almost every dream of the Spectator and Tatler, and the endless imitations of them since? Who does not turn with absolute contempt from the rings, and gems, and philtres, and caves, and genii of Eastern Tales (falsely so called), as from the trinkets of a toyshop, and the trumpery of a raree-show?

There is no long allegory in our literature at all comparable to Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress;" and one principal reason why this is the most delightful thing of the kind in the world, is, — that, though "written under the similitude of a dream," there is very little of pure allegory in it, and few abstract qualities or passions are personified. From the very constitution of the latter, the reader almost certainly foresees what such typical beings will say, suffer, or do, according to the circumstances in which they are placed. The issue of every trial, of every contest, is known as soon as the action is commenced. The characters themselves are all necessarily imperfect, and, according to the law of their nature, must be in everlasting motion, or everlastingly at rest; always rejoicing, or always weeping; infallibly good, or incorrigibly bad. In short, the arms and legs of men, the wings and tails of animals — nay, the five senses

themselves (as indeed they have been)—might as well be clothed with flesh and blood, and brought into dramatic action, as most of the creatures of imagination that figure away in allegory.

### *Dramatic Poetry.*

The dramatic form of poetry is so near an approach to the language and intercourse of real life, as, when skilfully constructed, to imply all the actions exhibited on the stage to the eye, through the words addressed to the ear, by the conversation of the persons, in the course of the scene. The opening of the first Act of Hamlet will most admirably illustrate this. Horatio and Marcellus join the sentinels Francisco and Bernardo, at night, on the platform before the castle of Elsinore. There is bodily motion expressed or indicated in every one of the brief challenges and responses between the parties, which being closed, Horatio enquires —

" What, has this thing appear'd again to-night ?

BERNARDO.

I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS.

Horatio says, 'tis but our phantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him,
Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us ;
Therefore I have entreated him, along
With us to watch the minutes of this night ;
That if again this apparition come,
He may approve our eyes, and speak to it.

HORATIO.

Tush! tush! 'twill not appear.

BERNARDO.

Sit down awhile;
And let us once again assail your ears,
That are so fortified against our story,
What we two nights have seen.

HORATIO.

Well, sit we down,
And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.

BERNARDO.

Last night of all,
When yon same star that 's westward from the pole,
Had made his course to illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself—
The bell then beating one ——

MARCELLUS.

Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!

BERNARDO.

In the same figure, like the king that 's dead.

MARCELLUS.

Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

HORATIO.

Most like: — it harrows me with fear, and wonder.

BERNARDO.

It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS.

Speak to it, Horatio.

HORATIO.

What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? — By heaven, I charge thee — speak!

MARCELLUS.

It is offended.

BERNARDO.

See! it stalks away.

HORATIO.

Stay; speak: speak, I charge thee, speak.

MARCELLUS.

'Tis gone, and will not answer."

Here every line is alive with *action*, as well as *voice*, to communicate in every clause fresh intelligence of the feelings of the speakers, and to bring out their individual characters; but, above all, to intimate, in the simplest manner, those awakening circumstances of the tragic story about to be developed, with the time, place, and manner of its occurrence, which are calculated to prepare the mind of the reader or spectator for the sequel. It is remarkable, that in the progress of more than forty interlocutions, involving four distinct scenes, by the change of persons, within

less than fourscore lines from the opening of this play, there is no necessity for a single stage direction: — every look, attitude, and movement of the six characters (including the Ghost) being so infallibly indicated, that not the minutest particle which can give poetic or picturesque effect to the reality of the spectacle is omitted. This is the consummation of dramatic art, hiding itself behind the unveiled form of nature.

The foregoing illustration is all that the limits of these Essays will allow on the subject of theatrical entertainments. Of the morality of the stage I have nothing to say, except that, in proportion as the style of dramatic composition has been purified, the talent displayed by writers, in what ought to be at once the most directly moral and constitutionally sublime species of verse, has become less and less conspicuous. Without disparagement either to virtue or genius, sufficient reasons might be assigned for such an anomaly, — but this is not the fit occasion for explaining them. With a few honourable exceptions, — among which may be named the tragedies of Miss Mitford and Mr. Sheridan Knowles, — the efforts of our contemporaries in this field have been less successful in *deserving* success, than in any other walk of polite literature. I refer solely to *acting* plays. Mrs. Joanna Baillie, the Rev. H. Millman, the Rev. G. Croly, Messrs. Coleridge, Sotheby, and some others, have written Tragedies for the mind and the heart, which rank among the noblest productions of the age.

A very different judgment must be passed on the dramas of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most of these, notwithstanding the treasures of poetry buried in them, have been abandoned to an obscurity as ignominious as oblivion, on account of their atrocious profligacy;—like forsaken mines, no longer worked, though their veins are rich with ore, because of the mephitic air that fouls their passages, and which no safety-lamp yet invented can render innoxious to the most intrepid virtue. It is grievous to think, that so many of the most powerful minds that ever were sent into this world to beautify and bless mankind, like morning stars with loveliest light, or vernal rains with healing influence, should have been perverted from their course into malignant luminaries, or from their purpose into sour, cold mildews, blighting and blasting the earth and its inhabitants, so far as their evil beams could strike, or their deadly drops could fall. It is true, that they represented man as he was, — not as he ought to have been;—not as he might have been — had poets always done their duty, and exhibited vice as vice, and virtue as virtue, instead of making each wear the disguise of the other; associating valour, wit, generosity, and other splendid qualities, with earthly, sensual, devilish appetites and passions: whereby the multitude, who possessed none of these brilliant endowments, were confirmed in their beloved vices; while those who were constitutionally or affectedly gallant, facetious, and affable, were induced to imagine, that, with these holiday virtues, they might indulge in the grossest propensi-

ties, and hold in contempt — as allied to meanness, pusillanimity, and hypocrisy whatever is pure, lovely, and of good report in woman, or meek, self-denying, self-sacrificing in man.

### *Religious Poetry.*

Dr. Johnson, in his Life of Waller, says: — "It has been the frequent lamentation of good men, that verse has been too little applied to the purposes of worship; and many attempts have been made to animate devotion by pious poetry: that they have seldom obtained their end is sufficiently known, and it may not be improper to enquire why they have miscarried. Let no pious ear be offended, if I advance, in opposition to many authorities, that poetical devotion cannot often please. * * * * * * * * The essence of poetry is invention; such invention as, by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights. The topics of devotion are few; and being few, are universally known: but, few as they are, they can be made no more; they can receive no grace from novelty of sentiment, and very little from novelty of expression. Poetry pleases by exhibiting an idea more grateful to the mind than the things themselves afford. This effect proceeds from the display of those parts in nature which attract, and the concealment of those that repel the imagination: but religion must be shown as it is; suppression and addition equally corrupt it; and such as it is, it is known already. From poetry the reader justly ex-

pects, and from good poetry always obtains, the enlargement of his comprehension, and the elevation of his fancy; but this is rarely to be hoped by Christians from metrical devotion. Whatever is great, desirable, or tremendous, is comprised in the name of the Supreme Being. Omnipotence cannot be exalted; infinity cannot be amplified; perfection cannot be improved. * * * * * Of sentiments purely religious, it will be found that the most simple expression is the most sublime. Poetry loses its lustre and its power, because it is applied to the decoration of something more excellent than itself. All that pious verse can do, is to help the memory, and delight the ear; and for these purposes it may be very useful; but it supplies nothing to the mind. The ideas of Christian theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures, is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere."

Having, in the Introductory Essay to a volume of Sacred Poetry *, minutely examined the long and, I may say, the celebrated argument, of which the foregoing is but an abstract, I shall not go into particulars here to prove the mistake under which the great critic labours; but I may briefly remark, that the more this dazzling passage is examined, the more

* "The Christian Poet, or Selections in Verse on Sacred Subjects," by James Montgomery: published by W. Collins, Glasgow; and Whittaker, London.

indistinct and obscure it becomes (according to the true test of truth itself, as laid down in a former paper *); and in the end it will be found to throw light upon a single point only of the question, — a point on which there was no darkness before, — namely, that the style of devotional poetry must be suited to the theme, whether that be a subject of piety, or a motive to piety.

Those who will take the trouble to examine the passage at length, will find that all the eloquent dictation contained in it affects neither argumentative, descriptive, nor narrative poetry on sacred themes, as exemplified in the great works of Milton, Young, and Cowper. That man has neither ear, nor heart, nor imagination to know genuine poesy, and to enjoy its sweetest or its sublimest influences, who can doubt the supremacy of such passages as the Song of the Angels in the third, and the Morning Hymn of Adam and Eve in the fifth book of "Paradise Lost;" the first part of the ninth book of the "Night Thoughts;" and the anticipation of millennial blessedness in the sixth book of "The Task;" yet these are on sacred subjects, and these are religious poetry. There are but four universally and permanently popular *long* poems in the English language,—"Paradise Lost," "The Night Thoughts," "The Task," and "The Seasons." Of these, the three former are decidedly religious in their character;

* See Lecture II.

and of the latter it may be said, that one of the greatest charms of Thomson's masterpiece is the pure and elevated spirit of devotion which occasionally breathes out amidst the reveries of fancy and the pictures of nature, as though the poet had caught sudden and transporting glimpses of the Creator himself through the perspective of his works; while the crowning Hymn, at the close, is unquestionably one of the most magnificent specimens of verse in any language, and only inferior to the inspired prototypes in the Book of Psalms, of which it is, for the most part, a paraphrase. — As much may be said of Pope's "Messiah," which leaves all his original productions immeasurably behind it, in combined elevation of thought, affluence of imagery, beauty of diction, and fervency of spirit.

It follows, that poetry of the highest order may be composed on pious themes; and the fact that three out of the only four long poems which are daily reprinted for every class of readers among us, are at the same time religious,—that fact ought for ever to silence the cuckoo-note, which is echoed from one mocking-bird of Parnassus to another,—that poetry and devotion are incompatible: no man in his right mind, who knows what both words mean, will admit the absurdity for a moment. I have already endeavoured to show*, that gorgeous ornament is no more essential to verse, than naked simplicity is essential to prose. There must, therefore, within the compass of human

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* See Lecture III.

language, be a style suitable for "contemplative piety" in verse as well as in prose;—a style for penitential prayer, as well as for holy adoration and rapturous thanksgiving. If nothing can be poetry, which is not elevated above ordinary speech by "decorations of fancy, tropes, figures, and epithets," many of the finest passages, in the finest poems which the world has ever seen, must be outlawed and branded with the ignominy of prose. It is true, that there is a vast deal of religious verse, which, as poetry, is utterly worthless; but it is equally true, that there is no small portion of genuine poetry associated with pure and undefiled religion, among the compositions even of our Hymn-writers. What saith Milton on "the height of this great argument?" Hear him in prose, that wants nothing but numbers to equal it with any page in "Paradise Lost."

"These abilities are the inspired gifts of God, rarely bestowed; and are of power to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility; to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's almightiness, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of pious nations doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ; to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship. Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue amiable and

grave; whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of that which is called fortune from without, and the wily subtleties and refluxes of man's thoughts from within; all these things, with a solid and treatable smoothness, to paint out and describe: — teaching over the whole book of sanctity and virtue, through all the instances of example, with such delight to those especially of soft and delicious temper, who will not so much as look upon truth herself, unless they see her elegantly dressed; whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they will *then* appear to all men easy and pleasant, though they were rugged and difficult indeed."—*On Church Government*, book ii.

The art, of which this is a true description, must be the highest of all arts, and require the greatest combination of fine faculties to excel in it. That art is poetry; and the special subjects on which it is here exhibited, as being most happily employed, are almost entirely sacred. The writer is Milton, who, in his subsequent works, exemplified all the varieties of poetical illustration here enumerated, and justified his lofty estimate of the capabilities of verse, hallowed to divine themes, by the success with which he celebrated such in "Paradise Lost," "Paradise Regained," and "Samson Agonistes." Not another word can be necessary to refute the notion, that religious subjects are incapable of poetic treatment. Dr. Johnson himself says nothing of the kind; and yet, upon his authority, (from a misunderstanding of two passages

in his criticisms on Waller and Watts,) this notion is still held by men who ought to be ashamed of it.

### *Didactic and Descriptive Poetry.*

I class these two together, because poets themselves so often unite them; for though we have abundance of pieces, in which, if "pure description holds (not) the place of sense," but occupies its own picturesque position with independent and due effect, yet few compositions in verse can be purely preceptive, without the "aid of foreign ornament;" nor can it be literally said of any art or science, thus handled, that its "beauty" is, "when unadorned, adorned the most." It must be arrayed and enriched with extrinsic graces, or renounce all pretensions to attractiveness from the poor and impolitic use of metre. It is the misfortune of didactic poetry, that for the purposes of teaching, it has no advantage over prose; and, in fact, from the difficulty of adapting the elegancies of verse to common-place details, it often falls lamentably short of common sense, in unnatural attempts to convey the simplest meanings in bloated verbiage. Pure directions of any kind, especially on technical subjects, may be delivered more precisely and intelligibly in the ordinary language of men, diversified with the terms of that art which is taught. Every specimen of this class, from the days of Hesiod to those of the late James Grahame — not excepting what has been deemed, in point of execution, the most perfect poem of antiquity, the Georgics of Virgil,—every specimen

of this class establishes the truth, or rather the truism, above laid down.

In a poem on agriculture, it is self-evident, *à priori*, that instructions in hedging, ditching, draining, hay-making, sowing, reaping, &c. can assume little or nothing of poetry beyond the shape of rhythm to the eye, for they will scarcely admit the sound of it to the ear, in higher harmony, or sweeter diction, than may be found by humming and counting the fingers over old Tusser's "Five Hundred Points in Husbandry." Lessons on manual occupations, domestic economy, or even learned pursuits, cannot alone be the burthen of song, or it will soon be no song at all; for with "music, image, sentiment, and thought,"—the elements of poetry,—they have no affinity. I confine the remark to the *instructions*, because the things themselves may sometimes be made highly poetical and interesting; but then they cease to be didactic, and become descriptive. Thomson's great work, with a few precepts intermingled, presents, in beautiful series and harmonious connection, the phenomena of nature, and the operations of man contemporary with these, through the four seasons;—forming, in fact, a biographical memoir of the infancy, maturity, and old age of an English year. — Grahame, in his "British Georgics," has written a preceptive poem, in which similar subjects are included; but here the lovely and magnificent appearances of nature are extraneous embellishments, while the labours of the farmer (the Scotch farmer), mean in themselves, are daily *directed*, and occasionally *delineated*, according to the succession of months. Between the plans of the two poems

there can be no comparison, and between the execution I will make none. The God of nature has divided the year into several distinct gradations, however obscurely the boundaries of each may be marked; so that every body has clear and fixed ideas of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, from personal observation of the varying surface of the earth, the aspect of the heavens, the temperature of the air, and those employments of the husbandman by which they are respectively characterised. On the other hand, the distribution of the year into months is an arbitrary arrangement by man, which suits the almanack-maker much better than the poet. The phases (if we must use the term) of June and July, of December and January, — indeed, of any two contiguous months,—are too little diversified to admit of contrasted pictures of each, without producing monotony by repetition, or defect by omission, of those features which happen to be common to both. Indeed, in our irregular climate, the months sometimes seem to have changed places, particularly in the earlier half of the year, the advance of vegetation being far less undeviating than its decay. Thomson's is a descriptive poem, interpolated with precepts in their right places; Grahame's is a preceptive one, in which descriptions luckily superabound, and are never deemed misplaced; for without them its pages would be unreadable. Hence, in a didactic poem, the finest passages are those which are *not* didactic;—branches bearing flowers and fruit, engrafted on a stock which, of itself, would put forth nothing but leaves.

Grahame's "Sabbath," and his "Birds of Scot-

land," are better known than his "British Georgics." His taste was singular, and his manner correspondent. The general tenour of his style is homely, and frequently so prosaic, that its peculiar graces appear in their full lustre, from the contrast of meanness that surrounds them. His readers may be few; but whoever does read him, will probably be oftener *surprised* into admiration, than in the perusal of any one of his contemporaries. The most lively, the most lovely sketches of natural scenery, of minute imagery, and of exquisite incident, unexpectedly developed, occur in his compositions, with ever-varying yet ever-assimilating features. All his beauties are of one kind; they have a family likeness, with infinite diversity of resemblance. I mean those beauties which most abound in him,—and more in him than in any other writer; because, by the bent of a mind predisposed to a particular class of subjects, and with microscopic accuracy of observation, he curiously and constantly searches for them; while his brethren only take them as they fall in their way, or are necessary for the extraordinary embellishment of some other figure to which they are subordinate. These are almost exclusively descriptive; they consist in secondary qualities, and remote or relative contingencies, which, by unforeseen association, place an object in a novel and delightful point of view, give a quick and happy turn to a train of thought, or infuse such life and reality into a scene, by the sudden introduction of a sprightly image or an affecting circumstance, that the reader is instantly converted into a spectator on the spot, and forgets the

poet, the poetry, and every thing except the palpable illusion which, for the moment, captivates his attention. It is like looking down into a concave mirror, in a darkened room, when, expecting to see our own features reflected, we are startled by the appearance of a strange countenance * rising towards us, and on the instant are completely deceived. An example will explain this better than ten periods of definition, or a long string of metaphorical illustrations. Take the picture of a corn-stack, from the "British Georgics."

"Of forms the circular is most approved,
As offering, in proportion to its bulk,
The smallest surface to the storm's assault.
— To turn the driving rains, the outer sheaves,
With bottoms lower than the rustling tops,
Should sloping lie. When, to the crowning sheaf
Arrived, distrust the sky; the thatch lay on,
And bind with strawy coils. O, pleasant sight;
These lozenged ropes, that, at the tapering top,
End in a wisp-wound pinnacle — a gladsome perch,
On which already sits poor Robin, proud,
And sweetly sings a song to harvest-home!"

In these lines, nothing can be more dry or unentertaining than all that immediately belongs to the subject; but just when the reader is congratulating himself that the paragraph is within a couplet of the close,— he *sees*— he *hears*— "poor Robin," perched and singing on the twisted pinnacle; and,

* The countenance of a person placed opposite, without our knowledge, and looking into the mirror at the same time.

instead of a mere recipe to make a corn-stack, the bodily image of one, newly thatched, is at once placed before his eye, while his ear is regaled with the sweet small notes of the bird of autumn.

The fashionable as well as the familiar poetry of the present day sparkles with fanciful yet true descriptions, of which the subjects are, in general, among the most obvious, and yet the least noticed circumstances, recurring every day, and every where. The brilliant parterres of Miss Landon's enclosure, on the south of Parnassus, where ideas, like humming-birds, are seen flying about in tropical sunshine, or fluttering over blossoms of all hues and all climes; and the home meadows of John Clare, the Northamptonshire peasant, whose thoughts, like bees, are ever on the wing in search of honey from "the meanest flower that blows;" are equally productive of these "curiosities of literature." A specimen from the latter (as less known of the two) will show to what perfection the art of making much of a little has lately been carried.

### THE THRUSH'S NEST.

"Within a thick and spreading hawthorn bush,
That overhung a mole-hill large and round,
I heard, from morn to morn, a merry thrush
Sing hymns of rapture, while I drank the sound
With joy; — and oft, an unintruding guest,
I watch'd her secret toils from day to day,
How true she warp'd the moss to form her nest,
And modell'd it within with wood and clay.

And by and by, like heath-bells gilt with dew,
There lay her shining eggs as bright as flowers,
Ink-spotted over, shells of green and blue:
And there I witness'd, in the summer hours,
A brood of nature's minstrels chirp and fly,
Glad as the sunshine and the laughing sky."

JOHN CLARE.

Here we have in miniature the history and geography of a "Thrush's Nest," so simply and naturally set forth, that one might think such strains

"no more difficile,
Than for a blackbird 'tis to whistle;"

but let the heartless critic who despises them try his own hand, either at a bird's nest, or a sonnet like this; and when he has succeeded in making the one, he may have some hope of being able to make the other.

The happy peculiarities of that kind of descriptive poetry, which with us is indigenous—nothing of similar growth having been preserved in the remains of antiquity, nor any thing to compare with it found among the luxuriant products of modern Italy,—may be illustrated by a quotation or two from the writings of a bard of the same humble class with John Clare, but who was not less curious in marking, and skilful in delineating, the charms of external nature, and the occupations of rural industry, than the poet of "The Seasons" himself. The author of the "Farmer's Boy" was exalted above his deserts at the beginning of his career; and, according to the usual re-action of things in this perverse world, depreciated as much

below them in the sequel. Death, the universal administrator of those who die leaving an inheritance which cannot be willed, is adjusting the claims of posterity to what he has left behind which may be worthy of preservation; and he has already obtained that place in the esteem of those whose judgments are final, which he will probably hold during his century of probation. Robert Bloomfield's Country Muse resembled the Country Maiden, which he paints so prettily in his "Rural Tales:"—

"No meadow-flower rose fresher to the view,
That met her morning footsteps in the dew;
When, if a nodding stranger eyed her charms,
The blush of modesty was up in arms;
Love's random glances struck the' unguarded mind,
And beauty's magic made him look behind."

Thus, the public fell in love with the simple Suffolk Muse at first sight; and turning to look, when she had passed by, praised her gait, her shape, her countenance, and air, as all enchanting and unrivalled. But meeting her repeatedly afterwards in the walks of Parnassus, and deeming her less fascinating at every interview, that public, whose affections are more variable than the clouds, which change colour in every light, and form in every breeze, soon discerned her homeliness of feature, rusticity of accent, and inelegance of manners.—Hence, though familiarity never bred contempt, her modest graces were successively eclipsed by the dazzling pretensions of higher born and higher gifted rivals, so that few continued to behold her with the

partiality of Walter to Jane, in his first love. This poet's real merits must, at any rate, have been considerable, to have survived the indiscreet panegyrics of mistaken friends, and the carping criticisms of fastidious enemies.

Bloomfield excels in description, because he presents images and pictures both of living and inanimate nature, which every unperverted eye recognises at once, and which often occasion not only an emotion of pleasure at finding them in verse, but of surprise also that they were never found there before; because, though perfectly familiar, the originals themselves never touched us so exquisitely as the poet's exhibition of them does. I prefer an extract on one of the most hackneyed themes of vulgar rhyme, on which he who could produce novelty must have been well entitled to poetic honours. Mentioning the task of Giles, in spring, to watch the new-sown crops, and himself to frighten away the rooks,—or having shot a few of the marauders to hang them up as scarecrows, or spread them out dead on the ground, to warn away their pilfering companions, these lines occur:—

" This task had Giles in fields remote from home;
Oft has he wish'd the rosy morn to come;
Yet never was he famed, nor foremost found,
To break the seal of sleep — his sleep was sound;
But when, at daybreak, summon'd from his bed,
Light as the lark that caroll'd o'er his head: —
His sandy way, deep-worn by hasty showers,
O'erarch'd with oaks that form'd fantastic bowers,
Waving aloft their towering branches proud,
In borrow'd tinges from the eastern cloud,

— Gave inspiration pure as ever flow'd,
And genuine transport in his bosom glow'd.

" His own shrill matin join'd the various notes
Of nature's music from a thousand throats:
The blackbird strove with emulation sweet,
And Echo answer'd from her calm retreat;
The sporting whitethroat, on some twig's end borne,
Pour'd hymns to freedom and the rising morn:
Stopp'd in her song, perchance, the starting thrush
Shook a white shower from the blackthorn bush,
Where dew-drops, thick as early blossoms hung,
And trembled while the minstrel sweetly sung:
Across his path, in either grove to hide,
The timid rabbit scouted by his side;
Or pheasant boldly stalk'd along the road,
Whose gold and purple tints alternate glow'd."

Every couplet here shows the difference between a genuine poet and a mere accomplished versifier. Four lines will be sufficient to explain and justify this assertion. Any rhymer might have placed the thrush upon the thorn, amidst blossoms and dew-drops; but mark what a variety of *incidents* the nice observer of nature strikes out. He startles the bird in the midst of her song; she flies off, and shakes from the black-thorn (the sloe) the earliest and frailest of the season, "a white shower" upon the ground; but instantly recollecting how "the minstrel" had been sitting before she was disturbed, he describes her perched amidst the thorny sprays, covered with flowers and moist with dews. I repeat the lines, and call particular attention to the last: —

" Stopp'd in her song, perchance, the starting thrush
Shook a white shower from the blackthorn bush,

Where dew-drops thick as early blossoms hung,
And *trembled* while the minstrel sweetly sung."

Are not the ideas as thick as the blossoms, and as brilliant as the dew-drops?

Bloomfield has another merit; it is his own, and he deserves a statue for it. In his "Rural Tales," he has succeeded in the patriotic attempt to render the loves and joys, the sports and manners, of English peasants interesting. I recollect no poet before him, who, by a serious, unaffected delineation of humble life, as it actually exists, had awakened strong sympathy, in people more prosperously circumstanced, towards the lower classes of the community. In Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," much entertainment is afforded, and compassion excited, by the inimitable skill and pathos of the author in displaying the characters, pastimes, wrongs, and sufferings of the natives of "Auburn:" but still the reader *condescends* to be pleased, or to pity; and the poet is rather their advocate than their neighbour, or one of themselves; — there is little of *fellow*-feeling in the case. Gay and others, who have pretended to celebrate rural swains and maidens, have always degraded them by a mixture of the ludicrous with the true, to give spirit to their descriptions; thereby making, what might have been natural and affecting, merely grotesque and amusing. I take no account here of that most artificial of all kinds of verse, while it pretends to be the most natural, — the pastorals of our earliest poets, or those of later ones down even to Pope (in imitation of very questionable models in

classic literature), and numberless Arcadian masquerades in Continental languages, full of splendid faults, which need not be either exposed or reprobated here, — I take no notice of these; they have been long and worthily exploded, as having no more reference to the state of society in this island, or elsewhere under the moon, than to the manners and customs of the inhabitants of that planet itself, if such there be. Bloomfield has done for England, what all her native bards have done for Scotland. "Richard and Kate," "Walter and Jane," and "The Miller's Maid," therefore, are unique and original poems, which, by representations equally graphic and dramatic of what they really are, have rescued English peasants from unmerited reproach, and raised them to equality with their Scottish neighbours, whose character, in verse at least, is associated with all that is romantic in love or delightful in song.

A paragraph of description, minute and elaborate to a degree, yet expanded into such magnificence, that in its progress it fills the mind with glory as its subject does the heavens, while, being introduced as a simile, it is associated with moral sentiment of that high cast which makes "the whole of unintelligent creation poor," — must close this section: —

> "As the ample moon,
> In the deep stillness of a summer-even,
> Rising behind a thick and lofty grove,
> Burns, like an unconsuming fire of light,
> In the green trees; and, kindling on all sides
> Their leafy umbrage, turns the dusky veil
> Into a substance glorious as her own,

Yea with her own incorporated, by power
Capacious and serene; — like power abides
In man's celestial spirit. Virtue thus
Sets forth and magnifies herself; thus feeds
A calm, a beautiful, and silent fire
From the incumbrances of mortal life,
From error, disappointment, — nay, from guilt,
And sometimes (so relenting Justice wills)
From palpable oppressions of Despair."

WORDSWORTH'S *Excursion.*

## *Lyric Poetry.*

It would be impossible to define the limits, or lay down the laws, of what passes in our own country under the title of Lyric Poetry. In these brief papers, there is no room to expatiate upon terms; it will, therefore, be more convenient, and quite as profitable, to elucidate this nondescript division of the subject by examples and comments, rather than by abstract disquisition. Italy, rich in every kind of poetry, except the purely descriptive, stands without rival among the nations of Europe in lyric composition. Yet, till Mr. Mathias, some twenty years ago, published six volumes of "*Componimenti Lirici de' più illustri Poeti d' Italia,*" the names of Filicaja, Guidi, Testi, Celio Magno, and others, were scarcely known among us, while those of Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso, were associated only with the "Divina Commedia," "Sonetti," "Orlando Furioso," and "Gerusalemme Liberata." It is true that there are myriads of pieces called Lyrics in our language and every year adds thousands to the number; yet

Da cui torcer non lice
Pur orma nè sperar pietade alcuna!
Che val, perch' altri sia chiaro e felice
Di gloria d' avi, o d' oro in arca ascoso,
E d' ogni don giojoso,
Che Natura puo dar larga, e fortuna,
Se tutto è falso ben sotto la luna."

These most beautiful and affecting lines contain no thought which has not been a thousand and a thousand times expressed; yet their influence is enchanting, for they realise, in a moment, mingled with mysterious delight, that ineffable fear of death which is interwoven with life, and which is natural to all men; for "willing" as the spirit even of the good may be, "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better," its frail companion shudders at a change which consigns her to worms, and darkness, and dissolution; — "the flesh is weak," and *trembles* into dust.

*Alessandro Guidi* has been crowned by Mr. Mathias with the thickest laurels; and fairly to him may be conceded all the glory that is due to one of the vainest and sublimest of poets. He speaks of himself frequently, and always in strains so boastful, that he would appear utterly disgusting and contemptible, did he not sing his own praises in language so captivating, and with such genuine dignity of thought and splendour of imagery, that we either forget or forgive the egotism of the man, in the overwhelming majesty of the poet. He actually seems to speak the truth; and truth is never offensive when we believe it heartily, unless it condemns

ourselves. Airy grandeur and irresistible impetuosity are the characteristics of his style; his genius is Grecian, but his spirit is Roman.

Gladly and unfearingly I turn to our English Lyrics, and begin with a very small example, which, however, (like the taper in the second stanza) grows clearer and brighter the more it is contemplated.

" The wretch, condemn'd with life to part,
Still, still on hope relies,
And every pang that rends his heart
Bids expectation rise.

" Hope, like the glimmering taper's light,
Adorns and cheers his way,
And still, as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray."

GOLDSMITH.

Is this poetry? Every one feels that it is. Is it fine versification? In that respect, also, it is unexceptionable. Now, the same ideas might be given in prose, without being deemed extravagant,— while in point of diction they could hardly be more humbly attired. Yet he who should attempt to do this, with equal effect, in any other form than the original, would find that he had set himself to catch a rainbow, and bend it in a contrary direction. *There* is the subject,— a captive under sentence of death, yet nursing in secret, almost from despair, the hope of life, with every pang. *Here* he is transformed into a benighted wanderer, whom the apparition of that cherished deceiver meets amidst the darkness and allures from afar, under the semblance of a stream of light from a cottage window, brightening

Da cui torcer non lice
Pur orma nè sperar pietade alcuna!
Che val, perch' altri sia chiaro e felice
Di gloria d' avi, o d' oro in arca ascoso,
E d' ogni don giojoso,
Che Natura puo dar larga, e fortuna,
Se tutto è falso ben sotto la luna."

These most beautiful and affecting lines contain no thought which has not been a thousand and a thousand times expressed; yet their influence is enchanting, for they realise, in a moment, mingled with mysterious delight, that ineffable fear of death which is interwoven with life, and which is natural to all men; for "willing" as the spirit even of the good may be, "to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better," its frail companion shudders at a change which consigns her to worms, and darkness, and dissolution; — "the flesh is weak," and *trembles* into dust.

*Alessandro Guidi* has been crowned by Mr. Mathias with the thickest laurels; and fairly to him may be conceded all the glory that is due to one of the vainest and sublimest of poets. He speaks of himself frequently, and always in strains so boastful, that he would appear utterly disgusting and contemptible, did he not sing his own praises in language so captivating, and with such genuine dignity of thought and splendour of imagery, that we either forget or forgive the egotism of the man, in the overwhelming majesty of the poet. He actually seems to speak the truth; and truth is never offensive when we believe it heartily, unless it condemns

ourselves. Airy grandeur and irresistible impetuosity are the characteristics of his style; his genius is Grecian, but his spirit is Roman.

Gladly and unfearingly I turn to our English Lyrics, and begin with a very small example, which, however, (like the taper in the second stanza) grows clearer and brighter the more it is contemplated.

> " The wretch, condemn'd with life to part,
> Still, still on hope relies,
> And every pang that rends his heart
> Bids expectation rise.
>
> " Hope, like the glimmering taper's light,
> Adorns and cheers his way,
> And still, as darker grows the night,
> Emits a brighter ray."
>
> GOLDSMITH.

Is this poetry? Every one feels that it is. Is it fine versification? In that respect, also, it is unexceptionable. Now, the same ideas might be given in prose, without being deemed extravagant,— while in point of diction they could hardly be more humbly attired. Yet he who should attempt to do this, with equal effect, in any other form than the original, would find that he had set himself to catch a rainbow, and bend it in a contrary direction. *There* is the subject,— a captive under sentence of death, yet nursing in secret, almost from despair, the hope of life, with every pang. *Here* he is transformed into a benighted wanderer, whom the apparition of that cherished deceiver meets amidst the darkness and allures from afar, under the semblance of a stream of light from a cottage window, brightening

as he approaches; while *we*, who fear the illusion may prove an *ignis fatuus*, are prepared to see him suddenly ingulphed in a morass. Poetry is the shorthand of thought;—how much is expressed here in less than threescore syllables!—

TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO FELL IN THE REBELLION OF 1745.

"How sleep the brave, who sink to rest
With all their country's wishes blest!
When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallow'd mould,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.

"By Fairy-hands their knell is rung,
By Forms unseen their dirge is sung;
There Honour comes, a pilgrim gray,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay;
And Freedom shall a while repair
To dwell, a weeping hermit, there."

COLLINS.

Again; what a quantity of thought is here condensed in the compass of twelve lines, like a cluster of rock crystals, sparkling and distinct, yet receiving and reflecting lustre by their combination. The stanzas themselves are almost unrivalled in the association of poetry with picture, pathos with fancy, grandeur with simplicity, and romance with reality. The melody of the verse leaves nothing for the ear to desire, except a continuance of the strain, or, rather, the repetition of a strain which cannot tire by

repetition. The imagery is of the most delicate and exquisite character, — Spring decking the turfy sod; Fancy's feet treading upon the flowers there; Fairy hands ringing the knell; unseen Forms singing the dirge of the glorious dead; but above all, and never to be surpassed in picturesque and imaginative beauty, Honour, as an old and broken soldier, coming on far pilgrimage to visit the shrine where his companions in arms are laid to rest; and Freedom, in whose cause they fought and fell,—leaving the mountains and fields, the hamlets, and the unwalled cities of England delivered by their valour, —hastening to the spot, and dwelling (but only for "a while,") "a weeping hermit there." The sentiment, too, is profound: — "How sleep the brave!" — not how sweetly, soundly, happily! for all these are included in the simple apostrophe, "*How* sleep the brave!" Then, in that lovely line,

"By all their country's wishes blest,"

is implied every circumstance of loss and lamentation, of solemnity at the interment, and posthumous homage to their memory, by the threefold personages of the scene, — living, shadowy, and preternatural beings. As for thought, he who can hear this little dirge "sung," as it is, by the "unseen form" of the author himself, who cannot die in it, — without having thoughts, "as thick as motes that people the sunbeams," thronging through his mind, must have a brain as impervious to the former, as the umbrage of a South American forest to the latter. There are in it associations of war, peace, glory, suffering, life,

death, immortality, which might furnish food for a midsummer day's meditation, and a midwinter night's dream afterwards, could June and December be made to meet in a poet's reverie.

FROM THE EXEQUY, ON THE DEATH OF A BELOVED WIFE.

(*By Henry King, Bishop of Chichester; born* 1591, *died* 1669.)

" Sleep on, my Love, in thy cold bed,
Never to be disquieted:
My last '*good night!*' thou wilt not wake
Till I thy fate shall overtake;
Till age, or grief, or sickness, must
Marry my body to that dust
It so much loves; and fill the room
My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.

" Stay for me there; I will not faile
To meet thee in that hollow vale;
And think not much of my delay,
I am already on the way,
And follow thee with all the speed
Desire can make, or sorrows breed.
Each minute is a short degree,
And every houre a step towards thee;
At night, when I betake to rest,
Next morn I rise nearer my West
Of life, almost by eight houres' sail,
Than when sleep breathed his drowsie gale!"

What a "*last* good night!" is this! and oh! what a *one* "*good morrow!*" to last for eternity, when such partners awake from the same bed, in the resurrection of the just! Is there the "man born of a

woman," who has loved a woman, and lost whom he loved, and lamented whom he has lost, that will not feel in the depth of his spirit all the tenderness and truth of these old-fashioned couplets? I dare not offer a comment upon them, lest I should disturb the sanctity of repose which they are calculated to inspire. Nature speaks all languages; and no style is too quaint or pedantic, in which she may not utter heart-sentiments in terms that cannot be misunderstood, or understood be resisted.

Gray is one of the few, the very few, of our greatest poets, who deserves to be studied in every line for the apprehension of that wonderful sweetness, power, and splendour of versification, which has made him (scholastic and difficult as he is) one of the most popular of writers, though his rhymes are occasionally flat, and his phrases heathen Greek to ordinary readers. The secret of his supremacy consists principally in the consummate art with which his diction is elaborated into the most melodious concatenation of syllables to form lines; and those lines so to implicate and evolve in progression, that the strain of one of Handel's Overtures is not more consecutively ordered to carry the mind onward, through every bar, to the march at the conclusion, when (as in the instance of the *Occasional Oratorio*) the hearer has been wrought to such a state of exaltation, that he feels as though he could mount the scaffold to the beaten time of such music.

" The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,

The cock's shrill clarion, and the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed."
GRAY'S *Elegy.*

This is one of the most striking stanzas in Gray's Elegy, which owes much of its celebrity to the concordance of numbers expressly tuned to the subjects, and felicity of language both in the sound and the significance of words employed. Yet in the first line of the verse above quoted, the far-sought elegance of characteristic description in "the breezy call of incense-breathing morn" is spoiled utterly by the disagreeable clash between "*breezy*" and "*breathing*," within a few syllables of each other. Contrast this with the corresponding line, and the dullest ear will distinguish the clear, full harmony of

"The cock's shrill clarion, and the echoing horn,"

from the asthmatical wheezing of the breeze and the breathing of the incense. This has been mentioned, not for the sake of petty criticism, but to render more emphatical the stress which I lay upon the pre-eminence of this author in the management of English rhythm.

"Oh, lyre divine! what daring spirit
Wakes thee now? though he inherit
Not the pride, nor ample pinion,
Which the Theban eagle bear,
Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air."
*Progress of Poesy*

Where can measures more noble than the foregoing be found in any modern tongue?

" Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,
While, proudly riding o'er the azure realm,
In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes,
Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm;
Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,
That, hush'd in grim repose, expects his evening prey."
*The Bard.*

It would be idle to descant on the diction or imagery of verses like these. I will only advert to the prophetic intimation of the catastrophe in the last clause. Had the poet described the tempest itself with the power of Virgil in the first book of his Æneid, it would have failed, in this instance, to produce the effect of sublime and ineffable horror, of which a glimpse appears in the background, while the gallant vessel is sailing with wind, and tide, and sunshine, on a sea of glory. All the sweeping fury of the whirlwind, awake and ravening over "his evening prey," would have been less terrible than his "grim repose;" and the shrieks and struggles of drowning mariners less affecting than the sight of

" *Youth* on the prow, and *Pleasure* at the helm,"

"regardless" of the inevitable doom on which they were already verging.

Dryden's "Alexander's Feast" is undoubtedly the lyric masterpiece of English poetry, in respect to versification; exemplifying, as it does, all the capabilities of our language in the use of iambics, trochees,

anapæsts, dactyls, and spondees. The metres in this composition are so varying, and yet so consonant; so harmonious, and so contrasted; they implicate and disentangle again so naturally, so necessarily almost, that I know not to what they can better be compared than to a group of young lions at play;—meeting, mingling, separating; pursuing, attacking, repelling; changing attitude, action, motion, every instant; all fire, force, and flexibility; exuberant in spirits, yet wasting none;—while the poet, like their sire couched and looking on, may be presumed, with his eye, to have ruled every turn and crisis of their game. He sings, indeed, the triumph of Music,—but his poetry triumphs over his subject; and he insinuates as much. It was less "the breathing flute and sounding lyre" of Timotheus, than the living voice, the changing themes, the language of light and power of the bard, "that won the cause." A single section will justify this praise; the measures, it will be observed, change in every couplet; there are scarce two lines alike in accentuation; yet the whole seems as spontaneous as the cries of alarm and consternation excited by the bacchanal orgies described.

"Now strike the golden lyre again:
A louder yet, and yet a louder strain;
Break his bands of sleep asunder,
And rouse him like a rattling peal of thunder.
Hark! hark! the horrid sound
Has raised up his head,
As awaked from the dead,
And amazed he stares around.
Revenge! Revenge! Timotheus cries;

See the Furies arise :
See the snakes that they rear,
How they hiss in their air,
And the sparkles that flash from their eyes.
Behold a ghastly band,
Each a torch in his hand!
Those are Grecian ghosts, that in battle were slain,
And unburied remain,
Inglorious on the plain : —
Give the vengeance due
To the valiant crew !
Behold how they toss their torches on high,
How they point to the Persian abodes,
And glittering temples of the hostile gods !
—The princes applaud with a furious joy,
And the king seized a flambeau, with zeal to destroy :
Thais led the way,
To light him to his prey,
And like another Helen fired another Troy."

### *Metrical Romances.*

A free and easy species of verse, which may be called the Lyrical Narrative, has been very fashionable since the first splendid achievements of the great master in this style,—Sir Walter Scott, who founded it upon the models of his elder countrymen; rejecting their barbarisms, and blending with their better manner an abundant proportion of modern refinements. This innovation affects various forms in its rhythmical cadences, but its practitioners confine themselves to none altogether: here, skirmishing away in the moss-trooping measures of "The Last Minstrel;" there, marching in stanzas of a mile, with the stately tread of

"Marmion;" and again, like "The Lady of the Lake," gracefully rowing along in octosyllabic time. Fifty romances, at least, have been published in this vein, of which five will not soon be forgotten. From one of these (the least irregular of Sir Walter's Border Epics), as an example of tragic power in which he has outgone himself, I extract the "Death of Roderic Dhu," the sternest of all his champions. Roderic, wounded and captive, is imprisoned in a hideous "donjon keep." A minstrel is introduced to him by mistake, who, being locked in with the chieftain Gael, sings, at his request, "The Battle of Beale and Duine." Roderic is thus represented:—

> "As the tall ship, whose lofty prore
> Shall never stem the billows more,
> Deserted by her gallant band,
> Amid the breakers lies astrand;—
> So on his couch lay Roderick Dhu!
> — And oft his fever'd limbs he threw
> In toss abrupt;— as when her sides
> Lie rocking on the advancing tides,
> That strike her frame with ceaseless beat,
> Yet cannot heave her from her seat;
> Oh! how unlike *her* course at sea!
> Or *his* free step upon the lea!"

After some discourse with his companions,—

> "The Chieftain raised his form on high,
> And fever's fire was in his eye;
> And ghastly pale and livid streaks
> Chequer'd his swarthy brow and cheeks."

The Minstrel begins his Lay; and after having sung long and furiously, the strain abruptly ends:—

" The harp escaped the Minstrel's hand! —
Oft had he stolen a glance, to spy
How Roderic brook'd his minstrelsy.

" *At first* the chieftain, to his chime,
With lifted hand, kept feeble time;
*That* motion ceased; — yet feeling strong,
Varied his look as changed the song:
*At length* no more his deafen'd ear
The Minstrel's melody can hear;
His face grows sharp; his hands are clench'd,
As if some pang his heart-strings wrench'd;
Set are his teeth, his fading eye
Is sternly fix'd on vacancy:
Thus, motionless, and moanless, drew
His parting breath, stout Roderic Dhu."

Here is a worthy companion-piece to the "Death of Marmion," so much celebrated. To me, the silence, the deafness, the terrible tranquillity of dissolution in the Highland Chief, are more awful and impressive than the delirious ecstasy, and the expiring shout, of the English hero:—

" 'Charge, Chester! charge! — on, Stanley, on!'
Were the last words of Marmion."

But

" —— motionless, and moanless, drew
His parting breath, stout Roderic Dhu."

### *Poetry for the Young.*

I shall particularise only one species more of this versatile art, little used in former times, but which

has been carried to extraordinary perfection in our own. The authors of those small volumes—"Original Poems," Rhymes for the Nursery," and "Hymns for Infant Minds,"—have indeed deserved well of their country, and long will their humble but admirable productions continue to bless its successive generations. Though even in these, they showed themselves qualified to indite for persons of larger growth, and entitled to claim high poetic honours, yet the fair and modest writers,—for they were of the better sex,—condescended to gather flowers at the foot of Parnassus to wreathe the brows of infancy, instead of climbing towards the summit to grasp at laurels for their own. I say, they condescended to do this, because it is hard for the pride of intellect to forego any advantage which might set off itself before the public. To most poets, it would have been no small annoyance to be confined to the nursery and playground, and sing to please little children, when they might command the attention of men;—for children, however they may be delighted with the song, pay no tribute of applause to the minstrel; but when they are charmed with a beautiful idea in a book, feel and express the same simple and unmixed pleasure as when they gaze upon a peacock, or listen to the cuckoo. It never enters into their unsophisticated minds to attach merit to the bestowers of such blessings. The sense and the desire of enjoyment are born with them, but gratitude and veneration they must be taught.

Hence, there is little temptation, except the pure impulse to do good, to compose works of any kind for

the amusement of those, who neither flatter the vanity, nor reward the labours, of their benefactors. The contributors to the volumes in question willingly sacrificed ambition; and were content to clothe *Truth* in language so clear and pure, that it should appear like a robe of light shining from heaven around her, to reveal her beauty and proportions, and thus attract the eye that rolled in darkness, and the feet that wandered in error before. How successfully they have effected their purpose, may be shown by three brief stanzas; which also prove what I have been most anxious in these papers to establish, that verse, in its diction, may be as unadorned and inartificial as prose, yet lose nothing of the elegance and grandeur of poetry. The attribute of Deity called omnipresence is, perhaps, as difficult to express otherwise than by that one emphatic word, as any other subject that can be imagined. A thousand illustrations might be more easily given, than one distinct idea of it. I may be mistaken, but I do think that the nearest possible approach has been made to it in the last of the following lines. A child speaks:—

> " If I could find some cave unknown,
> Where human feet have never trod,
> Even there I could not be alone,
> — *On every side there would be God.*"

This is a child's thought in a child's words; and yet the longer it is dwelt upon the more impressive it becomes, till we feel ourselves as much in the presence of Deity, as within the ring of the horizon, and

under the arch of heaven, wherever we go, and however the scene may be changed.

Eternity is another indefinite and undescribable thing. Hear a child's notion of it, and I am sure the wisest in this assembly will not be displeased with it: —

> " Days, months, and years must have an end;
> Eternity has none,
> *'Twill always have as long to spend*
> *As when it first begun.*"

The very impotence of language is sometimes the strongest expression of the sentiment to be conveyed. Here, when words break down under the weight of the thought, how natural and touching is the apostrophe in which the infant mind takes refuge from the overwhelming contemplation! Can I be wrong in wishing that he who now utters, and all who hear it, may be able to adopt the prayer? —

> " Great God! an infant cannot tell
> How such a thing can be:
> *— I only pray, that I may dwell*
> *That long, long time with Thee.*"

It would be injustice to forget, in this connection, Dr. Watts's " Divine Songs for Children." These form so small a portion of his multiform labours, that, were they expunged, the eye could scarcely perceive the bulk of one of the volumes diminished. Yet who can calculate the innocent pleasure, and the abiding profit, which those few leaves have afforded to myriads of minds through the lapse of a century? And much

more, who can estimate the treasure of instruction and delight which would thereby be lost to millions hereafter, through ages untold?

### *Translated Poetry.*

There is not in our language a popular translation of any classical author, which has been, is still, and will probably continue to be, a favourite with mere English readers, except Pope's versions of the Iliad and Odyssey. In these, with unprecedented originality of imitation, our countryman, affecting to put on Homer, has converted Homer into himself — hewn a Hercules into an Apollo; — for these gorgeous poems are undoubtedly read more for the beauties which the modern has conferred upon them, than for those which he preserved from the venerable ancient.

On the other hand, Cowper's translation, whatever be its positive defects, is one which no ordinary poetical power could have accomplished. There are many passages in it which leave Pope's brilliant paraphrases of the corresponding lines as far behind them, as they themselves may be deemed below the unapproachable Greek. But the general comparison between the two British Homers of the last century is always exceedingly to the disadvantage of the latter; for this, among other causes, — that translations of classic authors (unless on their first appearance) are very little read except by youth, and by these often before they have become sufficiently familiar with the originals to enjoy their surpassing excellence. With such readers, the first version of a favourite poet, if

it have high merit, so fills the imagination, unoccupied before, with the story, characters, and embellishments, all identified with its peculiar phraseology, that even a superior work afterwards, embracing the same subjects, cannot rival it. If, in two of our great seminaries, Cowper's Homer were the reading book of the scholars at the one, and Pope's of those at the other, it is probable that the cleverest lads,— those who really enjoyed the poetry of the translation,— would, to their lives' end, prefer that which had made the first ineffaceable impression upon their minds; and in such a case, it would be as difficult to supersede Cowper by Pope, as it is now to supersede Pope by Cowper.

Few of the merely English readers alluded to above, can patiently peruse, and not one in a hundred of them fervently admire, the Virgil of Dryden; much less that of Pitt and Warton, though far more faithful to the text of the author. In both, they look in vain for that perfection of thought and expression, that fulness without overflowing, ease without negligence, strength without harshness, which scholars have persuaded them are to be found in the original. A careless writer can never do justice to a laborious one. Dryden was careless, Virgil was laborious, in composition; neither the faults nor the merits of the English poem can be charged to the account of the Latin. On the other hand, neither Warton nor Pitt had breath to keep pace with Virgil, even when he walks; still less had they spirit to mount with him when he flies. Excellent critics are often indifferent poets. None, indeed, more learnedly than Warton,

could point out, in a commentary, the grace and grandeur of the Roman eagle's course; but he and Pitt, in verse, could do no more than mimic with their hands the action of his wings, and follow on earth his shadow, along the ground, as he sailed through the heavens. The fact is, that no man can think another man's thoughts, or so identically communicate his own, as to make another think them precisely as he himself does. How much more imperfectly, then, must they be transmitted through the medium of a second mind, in a new language, to a distant age, and among a strange people! Pitt and Warton hunted Virgil by the scent; and, therefore, were always behind him. Dryden might, perhaps, have matched his master, by deviating from his track, yet preserving the same direction; but he often loitered, generally hurried, by any means and by every means, endeavouring to get to his journey's end; and rather measuring the given distance, than choosing the right course,—

> "through straight, rough, dense, or rare,
> With head, hands, wings, or feet, pursued his way."
> MILTON.

Similar strictures might be passed upon all the translations in our language, whether of ancient or modern poems. Of such, however, no country can boast a larger number, possessing high intrinsic as well as great comparative merit.

# LECTURES ON POETRY.

## N° VI.

### ON THE POETICAL CHARACTER; THE THEMES AND INFLUENCES OF POETRY.

*The Desire of Fame.*

THERE is nothing so difficult to obtain as an earthly immortality. Dr. Young calls "the love of fame," "the universal passion;" and he has written a series of Satires to exemplify it. It is probably true, that every man living covets distinction, and in some point or other so far excels his neighbours as to imagine himself entitled, in that respect at least, to pre-eminence among them. This passion differs rather in degree than in kind from that "longing after immortality," which is almost peculiar to heroes and authors; —the greatest actors, and the greatest thinkers; the greatest realists, and the greatest imaginarians, — if I may coin a barbarous word for a special occasion. Heroes and authors, however, do not aspire to precisely the same species of immortality; the former seek-

ing to be remembered *for*, the latter *by* their performances; the first expect to live in the writings of other men, the second in their own.

### *Few Universal Reputations.*

Of all these candidates for posthumous renown, the poets, it may supposed, (without any disparagement to them, or to the rest, for this equivocal precedence,) are the most sanguine and romantic in their desires, and in their hopes. Two hundred thousand millions of human beings may have lived and died in this world since the creation. It would be idle to conjecture how many of these have been poets in their day, and intended within themselves to be poets till the consummation of all things. It is certain, however, that there is but one Homer, one Pindar, one Virgil, one Horace, and some twenty other names of secondary note, even including the three great Greek tragedians, who had out-lived in song the mortality of five thousand years, before the restoration of learning; and who, from peculiar circumstances, cannot now be expected to perish while man himself endures. Add to these from two to three hundred more, of comparatively modern date, and that number will comprehend all the poets, of all ages and countries, who are still locally, extensively, or universally admired.

Among the latter there are ten or twelve names (and it would not be easy to add as many more,) so familiarly associated with the revival and the early progress of letters in Europe, that they instantly recur to recollection when the subject, in reference to their

several countries, is brought under consideration. These, by a prescription which cannot now be set aside, and which it would be vain to dispute, have obtained such universality, as well as firm footing of fame, that they may be already ranked with the ancients afore-mentioned. Partly by primogeniture, but principally by uninherited and intransmissible nobility of genius, born with them in times peculiarly favourable to its fullest development, these few illustrious fathers, founders, and exemplars of the intellectual character of their respective nations, have acquired that supremacy, which, whatever be *their* comparative merits or faults, — and whatever the abstract claims of *contemporaries* or *successors*, — it becomes more and more difficult, through every improving age, for later aspirants to attain.

Of this small number of patrician names, Italy has had the glory of producing four,—Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso; Spain and Portugal one each, —Cervantes and Camoens; France, two (of very late growth)—Corneille and Racine; Holland might have furnished one,—Erasmus, but he chose rather to embalm his thoughts in a dead language, than keep them alive in his own; England adds two to the honourable list,— Shakspeare and Milton; Spenser (whom none but himself could have excluded by his perverse affectation of a style never spoken by man) ought to have been a third; and Chaucer might have been a fourth, (the first, indeed, in date) but time has dealt hardly with him, and almost forgotten the rugged tongue in which the merry bard delighted him of old, with many a tale of men and manners

seen no more on earth. For the rest of Europe, it will require a pause to think of another name to represent the literature of any one, or all its populous provinces; though the very circumstance of an effort being necessary, in such a case, to single out an individual,

> " Whose soul was like a star and dwelt apart,"
> WORDSWORTH.

among the hundreds recorded in biographical dictionaries, is sufficient proof that not one is to be found of the class to which allusion is now made;—not one, whose rank is so conspicuous, and his celebrity so unequivocal, that *his* existence, and the primal literature of his native soil being identified, a casual recurrence to either will bring to remembrance the other.

No stress is here laid upon any thing but the bare fact, that, among the multitude of eminent writers in Italy, Spain, France, England, and the rest of Christendom, between the *twelfth* and *seventeenth* centuries, (I purposely exclude all later born, as not having yet passed their full ordeal,) there are scarcely so many as twenty, of whom it can be unhesitatingly assumed, that, whatever be the future multiplication and extinction of books, *their* names and *their* works must last till a revolution in society, equal, but not similar, (for it is unimaginable that barbarism should ever again prevail,) to that which overthrew the empire and the arts of Greece and Rome,—shall utterly change the whole character of literary taste throughout the civilised world; or a scattering abroad of its

people, like that after the confusion of tongues at the building of Babel, shall dissipate the languages in which they have apparently immortalised their thoughts, or which have been immortalised by being made the vehicle of the same.

It is not questioned here, that many others may possibly survive as long as these, but it is not in the nature of things that many more, like them, should be men of all ages and all countries. The productions of those who shall most slowly descend from contemporary splendour into gradual obscurity and final oblivion, will necessarily be reduced, in the course of two centuries, to rarities in literature, seldom consulted, and read never, though from courtesy enumerated with honour in the catalogues of collectors; while a few of their more precious fragments may, perhaps, be preserved and quoted in popular selections for the use of schools, or the delight of holiday readers. Every generation will produce its Cowleys and Drydens, its Wallers and Carews, whose "freshe songis," (to use the antique phrase of Chaucer) in perennial succession, shall supersede the strains of their immediate predecessors.

The pre-eminence which the above-named, and a few others, have held, and must continue to hold, is scarcely more owing to their superior talents, than to some felicity, which may be called good fortune, either in the originality of their style, the choice of their subjects, or the lucky combination of both,—and that, not in all, nor even in their largest performances, but in some portion only, on which their better planets shone at the conception, and their bet-

ter genius presided over the birth. This circumstance also (irrespective of other contingencies) gives the few indestructible compositions of those master-spirits of elder times, an importance in a moral and intellectual point of view, which no other literary works of their own, and still less those of rivals (who may have otherwise been their equals or superiors) can claim. In these they have built monuments upon rocks above the high-water mark of time, which the flood of years (amidst perpetual vicissitudes, perpetually advancing,) shall never overwhelm.

### *Poetic Aspirations and Pursuits.*

Rare, however, as attainment to the highest honours in literature may be, there is no reason to believe that the compositions of any poet equal in rank to those unapproachable ancients, and those insurpassable moderns, already named, have been lost in the wreck of time past. Every civilised age produces its poets of the second order, who necessarily attract most of the admiration of their contemporaries, without injustice to those of the same standard, who preceded them, and whose fame, having passed the full, by an irreversible law of nature wanes till it becomes extinct, never to be renewed. Yet, since the peerage of Parnassus is not limited by the constitution of the commonwealth, and the chance of two hundred thousand millions to one, though fearful odds, does not imply absolute impossibility of any new aspirant reaching that dignity ; — moreover, as there has been one Homer, Pindar, Virgil, Horace,

&c. in that number of human beings, there may be another, and who knows but I am he? So reasons every young poet, in whose breast has been once fairly kindled that spark which flames up, though the fuel be but stubble, for immortality. No feeling, no passion of our nature is so easily and exquisitely quickened, so deeply and intensely cherished, so late and reluctantly abandoned. It is sometimes awakened on the mother's knee,—

"I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came."

POPE.

It is only foregone at the brink of the grave, where, as the lover to his mistress, the poet to his muse, exclaims with his last breath,

"Te teneam moriens, deficiente manu."

TIBULLUS.

"Dying I'll hold thee with a failing hand."

Might it not be inferred, however, that the desire of establishing an indestructible name, by the incalculable uncertainty of success, would be so repressed in all, that none, even among those who were gifted with the requisite powers, would ever achieve it from defect of adequate exertion? To this it may be answered, that hope is always bold, energetic, and persevering, in proportion to the conceived magnitude of its object; and the difficulties which dishearten him who *calculates*, only urge him who *presumes* to more resolute and indefatigable pursuit. Hence, it is the number only, not the ardour, of self-confident candidates for posthumous fame, which is lessened by the unimaginable disparity between

the hazard of acquiring, and the probability of missing it. Few, therefore, even among those who are called poets, fix their hopes or aims quite so high as has been stated; and of those few, just so many appear for a while to have reached the meridian, as to induce more, in every age, to risk the glorious venture, in which, even to miscarry is to fall from the chariot of the sun.

Among those, who are in truth so magnificently endowed, that they seem to have been sent into the world to enlarge and enlighten the compass of human intellect, to adorn and exalt the sphere of human enjoyment; — among those who, like the youthful Samson, in the camp of Dan, feel the early movings of a mighty spirit within them indicating the superiority, and prompting them to the trial of their prowess, — it is deeply to be lamented, that so many, like the same Samson, should spend their strength in dalliance, or waste it in unprofitable achievements, instead of employing it for the benefit, — may we not say, for the salvation, of their fellow-creatures? Genius is an awful trust, and when powers, like those of the Hebrew champion's, are abused, they frequently recoil, like his, in self-destruction upon their possessors' heads. Nothing can endure, even in this "naughty world," but virtue. To profit mankind a poet *must* please them; but *unless* he profits them, he will not please them long. Every age has its fashion of licentiousness, and will have its peculiar panders to vice, reckless of the profligacy of the ancients, and deaf to the songs of seducers, whose ribaldry has become as obsolete as the laced waistcoats, point-cravats,

and full-bottomed periwigs of Charles the Second's day. It would not, perhaps, be too hardy to affirm, that whatever may have been the case formerly, or whatever flagrant exceptions may be quoted, of modern date, — there is *now* scarcely any alternative left between "an honest fame" and "none." No living writer can hope for immortality in its only enviable earthly sense, who does not occupy his talents on subjects worthy of them, and, at least, *not* disreputable to their Author, — the Father of lights! The follies, the sins, and the misfortunes of poets, have, indeed, been proverbial since the proudest days of Greece. I shall neither expatiate upon these, nor palliate them; but a word or two may be expedient.

In youth, when we first become enamoured of the works of the great poets, we naturally imagine those must themselves be the happiest of men, who can communicate such unknown and unimagined emotions of pleasure, as seem at once to create and to gratify a new sense within us; while, by the magic of undefineable art, they render the loveliest scenes of nature more lovely, make the most indifferent topics interesting, and from sorrow itself awaken a sympathy of joy unutterably sublime and soothing. He, who, in early years has never been so smitten with the love of sacred song, as to have wished, nay, to have dreamed, that he was a poet, — as Hesiod is said to have done, though few like him, awaking, have found their dream fulfilled, — is a stranger to one of the purest, noblest, and most enduring sources of mortal blessedness. When, however, glowing with enthusiastic admiration, we turn from the writings to the lives of these

exalted beings, we find that they were not only liable to the same infirmities with ourselves, but that, with regard to many of them, those vehement passions, which they could kindle and quell at pleasure in the bosoms of others, ruled and raged with ungovernable fury in their own, hurrying them, amidst alternate penury and profusion, honour and abasement, through the vicissitudes of a miserable life, to a premature, deplorable, and sometimes a desperate death. On the other hand, among the more amiable of this ill-starred race, those finer sensibilities which warm the hearts of their readers with ineffable delight, were to the possessors slow and fatal fires, feeding upon their vitals, while they languished in solitude, and sank to the grave in obscurity, after bequeathing to posterity an inheritance, in the unrewarded products of their genius, to endure through many generations, and cast at once a glory and a shade on the era in which they flourished, as the phrase is, — in which they perished, as it ought to be.

On the whole, then, though it is a frigid and disheartening conclusion, — it is well when a youth of ardent hope and splendid promise, who has been allured into the "primrose path of dalliance" with the muses, by the songs of their most favoured lovers, heard like the nightingale's, unseen; — it is well, when such an one, in due time, (and before being irrecoverably bewildered,) is alarmed and compelled to retreat by the affecting and humbling sight of those lovers, in the characters of men, frequently of low estate, neglected or contemned by the multitude, trampled down by the pride of wealth and power, —

desponding martyrs of sloth, or suicidal slaves of intemperance. If ever there was an example of paramount genius, like the first created lion, bursting from the earth,

> " Pawing to get free
> His hinder parts ;"—
>
> MILTON.

then rampant, and bounding abroad, and "shaking his brinded mane," in all the joy of new-found life; —if ever there was such an example, calculated to quicken souls as sordid as the clod, and make them start up from behind the plough into poets, the story of Robert Burns affords it. And if ever there was a warning of the degradation and destruction of talents of the highest order, calculated to scare the boldest and vainest adventurer from the fields of poesy, the story of Burns presents that terrific warning; — that flaming sword turning every way, to forbid entrance into that paradise of fancied bliss, but real woe, in which he rioted and fell. But as I propose to allude further to his career in the close of this paper, at present I hasten to notice (very imperfectly, indeed) the themes of poetry, and its influences.

## *The Themes of Poetry.*

It is an affecting consideration, that more than half the interest of human life arises out of the sufferings of our fellow-creatures. The mind is not satisfied alone with the calm of intellectual enjoyments, nor the heart with tender and passionate emotions, nor the senses themselves with voluptuous indulgence.

The mind must be occasionally roused by powerful and mysterious events, in which the ways of Providence are so hidden, that the wisdom and goodness of God are liable to be questioned by ignorance or presumption, while faith and patience must be silent and adore:—the heart must sometimes be probed by sympathies so rending, that they only fall short of the actual agony to which they are allied;—the senses cannot always resist the undefineable temptation to yield themselves to voluntary torture.

Among the crowds that follow a criminal to execution, is there one who goes, purely, for the pleasure of witnessing the violent death of a being like himself, sensible even under the gallows to the inconvenience of a shower of rain, and cowering under the clergyman's umbrella, to listen for the last word of the last prayer that shall ever be offered for him?—No;—some may be indifferent, and a few may be hardened, but not one can rejoice; while the multitude, who are melted with genuine compassion, nevertheless gaze from the earliest glimpse of his figure on the scaffold, to the latest convulsions of his frame, with feelings, in which the strange gratification of curiosity, too intense to be otherwise appeased, so tempers the horror of the spectacle, that it can not only be endured on the spot, but every circumstance of it recalled in cool memory, and invested with a character of romantic adventure.

Can any sorrow of affection exceed, in poignancy, the anguish and anxiety of a mother, watching the progress of consumption in the person of an only son, in whom her husband's image lives, though he is

dead, and looks as he once looked when young, and yet a lover; —the son, in whom also her present bliss, her future hopes on earth, are all bound up, as in the bundle of life?—No;—there is a worm that dies not in her bosom, from the first moment when she feels its bite, on discovering the hectic rose upon his cheek, that awakens a thousand unutterable fears, — not one of which in the issue is unrealised, — till the last withering lily there, as he lies in his coffin, with the impress on his countenance of Death's signet, bearing, even to the eye of love, this inscription,— "Bury me out of thy sight!"—Yet, of all the pangs that she has experienced, there is not one, which she did not choose even for its own sake,—she *would not* be comforted!—there is not one, which she would have foregone for any delight under heaven, except that which it was impossible for her to know—his recovery; and while she lives, and while she loves, the recollections that endear him to her happiest feelings are heightened almost to joy in grief, by the remembrance of how much she suffered for him.

To the man of thought, all that is terrible and afflictive in nature, in society, in imagination, is food for his mind, such as spirits, alone, of higher temperament can fully taste and turn into luxury; but which inferior ones can relish, too, in no small measure. Earthquakes, volcanoes, lightning, tempest, famine, plague, and inundation; hard labour, penury, thirst, hunger, nakedness, disease, insanity, death;— the existence of moral evil; the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of man's heart; envy, malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness;—the commis-

sion and the punishment of crimes against society; oppression, bondage, impotent resistance of injustice; with all the wrongs and woes of a corrupt or a tyrannical government; the desolations of foreign war; the miseries of civil strife; — to sum up all, the troubles to which we are born, the calamities which we bring upon ourselves, the outrages which we inflict on each other, the judgments of Divine Providence on individuals, families, nations, the whole human race, — each class, and the whole accumulation of these awakening and appalling evils, not only afford inexhaustible subjects of sublime and inspiring contemplation to the sage, and themes for the poet; but by the manner in which they affect the entire progeny of Adam, prove that more than half the interest of mortal life arises out of the sufferings of our fellow-creatures.

The wisdom and kindness of God are most graciously manifested in thus educing good from evil. There is so much floating and perpetual distress in the world, and in every part of it, that were a person of the firmest nerve to know all that is enduring for one hour only, in one place, — the present hour, at this moment, throughout this great city, — and were he able to sympathise with it, in every case, and all at once, as though the whole were under his eyes, within hearing, in his neighbourhood, in his family, — his spirit would assuredly sink under it, and if life were prolonged, and reason not totally overthrown, he would never relapse into gaiety. On the other hand, there is so much selfishness in our nature, that if the groans of the whole creation around could

neither reach our ears, nor touch our hearts, we should be of all animals the most insensate, the most ferocious. It is good for us to be afflicted in the afflictions of others, but it would be death or madness to be so beyond that indefineable line, which Providence has drawn, and within which we are unconsciously kept by the power that wheels the planets in their orbits, and suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground without permission.

While the last paragraph was passing through my pen upon paper, a fly glanced through the candle-flame, fell backwards into the liquid round the wick, and lay weltering there for several seconds before the mercy of a trembling hand could inflict a speedier death than that which it was enduring. What an age of misery might have been condensed within those few moments to the poor fly, is inconceivable to man; but could this be ascertained by some curious enquirer, the nightly burnings alive of flies alone would be sufficient to render his own existence miserable; yet who would choose to be utterly regardless of the sufferings of the meanest insect, the structure of whose frame is a miracle of Omnipotence? and whatever cold-blooded scepticism may insinuate to the contrary, whose sensibilities are probably so acute, that, in the language of the poet, —

> "E'en the poor beetle that we tread on, feels
> As great a pang as when a giant dies."

And thus is man so "fearfully and wonderfully made," as to require for the health of his body, the expansion of his intellect, and the purifying of his

heart, other and sterner excitements than those of either sensual and enervating pleasure, or of placid and serene enjoyment. From his own personal maladies, and from a strong but well-governed sympathy with the fiery trials of his fellow-creatures of all kinds and conditions, he may derive, if not positive happiness, the means at least of infinitely increasing his happiness, by learning to suffer with resignation, by loosening his affections from the world, and by having his heart and his treasure in heaven. The famous lines of Lucretius, at the opening of his second book, *De Rerum Natura*, have been so often quoted and criticised, that I shall merely allude to them as beautifully bearing on the subject before us.

Let us take a signal instance to illustrate the general argument. It is twice seven years, or nearly so, since the death of the Princess Charlotte of Wales, and her new-born offspring; the former, the most beloved person in the realm; the latter, the heir of the greatest throne in the world, though it lived not long enough to receive even a name to be inscribed upon its coffin; so uncertain are the destinies of man, when most absolutely decreed by himself or his fellow-mortals. On that occasion the grief of the public was deep, sincere, and lasting; but who can doubt that the interest — using the word in its favourite sentimental sense — who can doubt that the interest, excited by these events, was transcendantly more sublime and affecting than would have been awakened by the loss of the same personages under circumstances less excruciating to

the common feelings of humanity, or less fatal to the fond expectations of a generous people? In proportion to the agony was the interest, and in proportion to the interest was the enjoyment, by those who bore a part in the universal affliction. There was enjoyment in remembering and repeating, in tones of regret, the virtues and graces of the Daughter of England, — there was enjoyment in making a Sabbath of the day of her burial, — enjoyment in listening to pious improvements from the pulpit of the sovereign dispensation of Providence, — enjoyment in mingling tears and lamentations with the whole British people, at the hour when her relics were laid in the grave, — enjoyment in composing and perusing the strains of eloquence and poesy, that celebrated her glory and her fall, — and there was enjoyment in every recollection of her name, after the bitterness of death had passed away, and her memory had been silently enshrined in hearts, where it had been fondly hoped that she would one day be enthroned.

Thus from the greatest *felt* calamity, which this country had suffered for ages, there was communicated the greatest benefit of the kind on record, to the minds of millions, by means of a chastening but benignant excitement, which produced a happier influence on the moral character of the people than all the victories of ten years' war had done, or the victories of ten more could now accomplish; for it quickened into expression, if not into immediate existence, more loyal, patriotic, compassionate, and devotional feelings than any national event, either prosperous or adverse, had done since Britain was a

kingdom. When the mighty are put down from their seats, we gaze at the eminence whence they are fallen, as we should upon the cliff where an eagle at rest had been struck dead by lightning in our sight, — the very void being then more conspicuous than was the living presence. When death brings down such noble marks in the highest places, his power is felt by re-action upon the fears and forebodings of all classes downward in gradation. We are so accustomed to read, and speak, and think of death as a real personage, with his darts striking down, indiscriminately, persons of all ages, ranks, and conditions — one of whom is said to be pierced every moment, his shafts flying incessantly, and in all directions — that, without any violent effort of mind, we may consider him as an "archer," indefatigable as well as "insatiate," who, in the course of nature, has never once missed a victim against whom he drew his bow, nor among tens of thousands of millions, which, since the creation, have been appointed to him for his prey, has he ever forgotten one; those whom he might seem to have left behind in his march of destruction, being from his lengthened forbearance most obviously exposed to his next aim; since the further they have escaped, the nearer have they been running into that danger which in the issue must be met.

Death is the chief hero of poetry, though life be its perpetual theme; and taking advantage of the strange affinity between pain and pleasure, to which reference has been made, the main subjects of verse have been selected from the sufferings of man in

every stage of his earthly existence, under every aspect of external circumstances, and through every form of society. The noblest lessons are taught in the school of adversity, and communicated by the examples of those who have learnt them there, to those who have not been so disciplined, in song rather than in history. Cowley says: —

" So when the wisest poets seek,
In all their liveliest colours, to set forth
A picture of heroic worth,
The pious Trojan, or the prudent Greek; —
They feed him, not with nectar, nor the meat
That cannot, without joy, be eat;
But, in the cold of want, and storms of adverse chance,
They harden his young virtue by degrees;
The beauteous drop first into ice doth freeze,
And into solid crystal doth advance.

" His murder'd friends and kindred he does see,
And from his flaming country flee;
Much is he tost by sea and land,
Does long the force of angry gods withstand;
He does long troubles and long wars sustain,
Ere he his fatal birthright gain:
— With not less toil and labour can
Destiny build up a great man,
Who 's with sufficient virtue fill'd
His ruin'd country to rebuild."

If it be the business of tragedy, as Aristotle allows, to purify the soul by pity and terror, then out of the ills of the universe, may poetry of every kind extract balm to heal, or comfort to allay them. Thus, in a new and admirable sense, is the riddle of Samson

illustrated. In the carcase of the young lion, which roared against him, and which he rent as he would tear a kid, when he turned aside to see it, behold a swarm of bees and honey in it! "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." Out of grief, misfortune, bereavement, the poet brings gladness, profit, consolation. There is no romance, no poetry in any of these things themselves to those who suffer (whatever there be to witnesses of them) till they are past. Sickness and death are cruel and fearful visitations; it is sickness removed, death averted, which makes health enjoyment, and escape renovation. The return to this lovely world, of him who has "shrieked and hovered o'er the dread abyss," that divides time and eternity, is more than life, — it is life from the dead. Then, then, the romance and the poetry begin, where the awful realities end.

When Hezekiah was sick unto death, and a message from the prophet said, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live:" then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and pleaded hard, and wrestled in agony of supplication for a reprieve. "And Hezekiah wept sore." But when his prayer had been heard, his tears seen, and fifteen years were added to his life, then was his mourning changed into minstrelsy, and the fear and anguish which had previously overwhelmed his spirit gave way to transport. Then, likewise, he could expatiate with delighted reminiscence, and in the most delicate and touching strains, on those incidents of his extremity, which had been

all horror and darkness while they were present. But in the joy of convalescence, he recalled the very circumstances and sentiments which had been struggling and despairing pangs in his heart before, and winged them with words that flew up to heaven's gate in notes of gratitude and praise: —

"The writing of Hezekiah, King of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered from his sickness. I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more, with the inhabitants of the world. Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent." * * * * * "I am oppressed; O Lord! undertake for me." * * * * "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but Thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption; Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. The grave cannot praise Thee; Death cannot celebrate Thee." * * * "The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do at this day." — *Isaiah*, xxxviii. 9—19.

The main themes of poetry might be summed up in a few phrases, or expanded into an Index to a Cyclopedia. I shall particularise two only in this place.

War; — the war of glory, in which ambition tramples down justice and humanity, to raise a single tomb for a favourite hero upon a Golgotha of nations — and war, — the war of freedom, in which death is preferred to chains, and victory is the emancipation or

the security of millions. War, also, assumes a thousand vulgar and atrocious forms; but these two alone are poetical ones. War has been the chief burden of epic poetry in ages past, however perils and labours, sufferings and conflicts, by land and by water, may have been intermingled with battle and devastation, according to the subject which was to be dignified and adorned above the strain of history, by the embellishments of fiction, and the music of verse. But the poets who have succeeded in this highest and most difficult field, are those who selected their heroes, and their scenes of action, from the traditions rather than the chronicles of times long antecedent. The most splendid achievements of contemporaries can receive no additional lustre from being celebrated in heroic narrative. Truth repels the touch of fable as the contamination of falsehood, in cases where the matters of fact are so fully known, or so easily ascertained, that the common sense of mankind will receive nothing unauthenticated in reference to them. Lucan fell *with* his hero in the battle of Pharsalia, and Sir Walter Scott himself was vanquished *by* his on the plain of Waterloo. The fight on the latter must for ever rank among the proudest examples of military ascendance; but, for a thousand years to come, it can hardly be seen (except by incidental glimpses, such as Lord Byron has caught of it in the Third Canto of "Childe Harold,") in an aspect fit for poetical aggrandisement. In lyric song, however, — as in the "Hohenlinden" of Campbell, and Wolfe's "Burial of Sir John Moore," — the glories even of modern warfare may be set

forth in lays, which rival or eclipse all that antiquity has left of the kind.

But Love, in all ages, and among all people, has been the principal source of poetic inspiration. Love, — the love of country, our native country; love, — the love of home, our own home, its charities, endearments, relationships; love, — the love which men ought to bear to their brethren, of every kindred, realm, and clime upon earth; love, — the love of virtue, which elevates man to his true standard under heaven; and, with reverence be it spoken, love, — the love of God, who *is* Love. I add once more, love, — *that* love, which is the prime, perpetual, ever young and fresh, and unexhausted theme of bards in each successive generation, as though it had never been sung before; — the love which Adam bare to Eve in Paradise; the love with which Eve compensated Adam in the wilderness, for the loss of that earthly Paradise, which he seems to have forfeited from excess of love to her. I cannot be wrong; I cannot be misunderstood, when I speak thus of that ineffable tenderness which includes whatever makes human love sweet, and lasting, and peculiar; the business of the heart, the subject of hope, fear, sorrow, rapture, despondency, despair, — each in turn, sometimes altogether; for so mysteriously mingled is the cup of affection, that the bitterest infusion will occasionally dash it with intenser deliciousness. All the vicissitudes of this love are pre-eminently poetical in every change of colour, form, and feeling which it undergoes, being intimately associated with all that is transporting or

afflictive, bright and pure, grand and terrible, peaceful, holy, and happy in mortal existence. On this theme, how gloriously soever they have often excelled, it must be confessed that poets have more grievously offended than on any other. Where they might have done most good they have done most evil. I forbear to expatiate here; suffice it to say, that taste and morals have been equally vitiated, and genius itself debased in proportion as it has thus been prostituted.

### *The Influence of Poetry.*

Poetry possesses a paramount degree of influence, from the fact, that sentiments communicated in verse are identified with the very words through which they have been received, and which frequently, more than the character of the sentiments themselves, give force, perspicuity, and permanence to the latter. The language and its import being remembered together, the instruction conveyed is rendered more distinct and indelible. The discourses of the orator, with all their beauty of embellishment, ardour of diction, and cogency of argument, are recollected rather by their effect than in their reality: what he has conceived and expressed with transcendant ability, we call to mind in its general bearings only, and repeat to ourselves, or to others, by imperfect imitation, and in very incompetent verbiage. This, of necessity, must be far inferior, in emphasis and clearness, to the original composition, whether that were spontaneous or elaborate; and if such be the case with eloquence,

much more will it be so with history, philosophy, and prose literature at large, from which the narratives, speculations, and reasonings, can only be recalled in the abstract, however fascinating in perusal the style of the writer may be. Of these, the epitomised matter, moral, or lesson alone, remains in the mind, which, being blended with our stock of general knowledge, general principles, general motives, — thus remotely becomes influential on our conduct and our lives.

Poetry, on the other hand, takes root in the memory as well as in the understanding,—not in essence only, but in the very sounds and syllables that incorporate it. This every one can testify from experience, who, as a child, was taught the songs of Dr. Watts, as a youth, went through Homer and Horace, and, as a man, made acquaintance with the native and foreign literature of his own and past ages. Of all his reading, that which he remembers most perfectly, and remembers in the words of the originals, will be poetry; poetry in the fixed form of verse, from which it cannot be dissociated without losing half its beauty, and more than half its influence.

That influence is further and incalculably increased from the circumstance that it is the business of poetry to invest whatever it touches with the hues of imagination, and animate that which is susceptible with the warmth of passion; at the same time never to depart from truth; for if it does, it departs from nature, and its creations are monsters, as incongruous in themselves as they are revolting to good taste.

Noble fictions are not disguises, but revelations of truth; shapes which she assumes to make herself visible to the mind's eye; indeed, so far is legitimate fiction from being any thing distinct from reality, that it can have no existence without it, but is neither more nor less than the fine ideal of reality.

In reference to the lamentable and frequent abuse of that best gift of influence (because the most potent, diffusive, and enduring,) which heaven has bestowed upon the poet for the best purposes — at once to delight and profit contemporaries and posterity — I may observe, that he holds a perilous talent, on a fearful responsibility, who can invent, combine, and fix with inseparable union, words, thoughts, and images, and give them motion like that of the planets,—not to cease till the heavens shall be dissolved, and the earth, with the works therein, burnt up. Is there a power committed to man so great? Is there one that can be more beneficently or more malignantly exercised? The deeds of warriors, the decrees of princes, the revolutions of empires, do not so much, so immediately, so permanently affect the moral character, the social condition, the weal and the woe of the human race, as the lessons of wisdom or folly, of glory, virtue and piety, pride, revenge, depravity, licentiousness, and the converse of these,—in the writings of those mysterious beings, who have an intellectual existence among us, and rule posterity, not "from their urns," like dead heroes, whose acts only are preserved in remembrance, but by their very spirits

living, breathing, speaking in their works;—therein holding communion with the spirits of all who read or hear their syren or their seraph strains; and thus becoming good or evil angels to successive generations, tempting to vice and crime, to misery and destruction; or leading through ways of pleasantness and paths of peace. Millions of thoughts and images, fixed in the palpable forms of words, and put into perpetual motion, by these benefactors or scourges of their species, are passing down in the track of time, upon the length and breadth of the whole earth, blessing or cursing the people of one age after another;—and, let authors tremble at the annunciation, perpetuating the righteousness or aggravating the guilt of men, whose bones are in the sepulchre and their souls in eternity.

Lord Bacon, remarking upon the destruction of all other works of men's hands, says of letters,—"The images of men's wits remain unmaimed in books for ever, exempt from the injuries of time,—because capable of perpetual renovation. Neither can they properly be called images, because, in their way, they generate still, and cast forth seeds in the minds of men, raising and procreating infinite actions and opinions in succeeding ages; so that, if the invention of a ship was thought so noble and wonderful,—which transports riches and merchandise from place to place, and consociates the most remote regions in participation of their fruits and commodities — how much more are letters to be magnified, — which, as ships passing through the vast sea of time, connect the remotest ages of wits and inventions in mutual

traffic and correspondence!"—*Of the Advancement of Learning*, Book i.

In this commerce of literature,—the Scriptures and the writings of divines excepted,—the compositions of the poets are undoubtedly the most extensively and abidingly influential, because they have had, in youth at least, the greatest power over the greatest minds; when, more even than history and uninspired ethics themselves, they have tended to form the characters, opinions, and actions of those who lead or govern the multitude, whether as princes, warriors, statesmen, philosophers, or philanthropists. The compositions of the poets have also this transcendant advantage over all others, that they are the solace and delight of the most accomplished of the finer, feebler, better sex, whose morals, manners, and deportment, give the tone to society;—not only as being themselves (to speak technically) its most agreeable component parts, but because they are the mothers and nurses of the rising generation, as well as the sisters, lovers, and companions most acceptable to the existing one, at that time when the affections of both sexes are gentlest, warmest, liveliest, and most easily and ineffaceably touched, purified, tempered, and exalted. What owe we not, in Britain, at this day, to Alfred?—Liberty, property, laws, literature; all that makes us as a people what we are, and political society what it ought to be. And who made Alfred all that he became to his own age, all that he is to ours?—She, who was more than a parent to him. "The words which his mother taught him," the songs which his mother sang to him, were the germs

of thought, genius, enterprise, action, every thing to the future father of his country. We owe to poetry, —probably to rude, humble, but fervent, patriotic poetry,—all that we owe to Alfred, and all that he owed to his mother.

But poetry makes poets. To exemplify this generating quality of poetic influence, by which it is itself transmitted and increased with every era of advancing time, I shall refer to the known history, character, and writings of two individuals, born and brought up in circumstances of life, which were so little likely to awaken and nourish poetic feelings in their minds, that it may be safely assumed concerning them, had they been born and brought up under any other circumstances, higher or lower in social rank, less favourable or more to the developement of natural genius, they would have grown up into poets, as surely as they grew up into men. Neither of them was of the first order; the one, indeed (Henry Kirke White), being but of a moderate, the other (Robert Burns) of a rare standard; but both of genuine poetic temperament.

### *Henry Kirke White.*

Nothing is trifling or insignificant in childhood, when every thing conduces to form the bias of an immortal mind; and every occurrence that awakens a new emotion is the forerunner of everlasting consequences. Such was the incident mentioned by Henry Kirke White, that before he was six years old he was accustomed to hear a certain damsel sing the affecting ballad of "The Babes in the Wood," and others,

alluded to in the following lines, written when he was little more than twice that age: —

" Many's the time I 've scamper'd down the glade,
To ask the promised ditty from the maid,
Which well she loved, as well she knew to sing,
While we around her form'd a little ring: —
She told of innocence foredoom'd to bleed,
Of wicked guardians bent on bloody deed;
Of little children murder'd as they slept,
While at each pause we wrung our hands, and wept;
Sad was the tale, and wonder much did we,
Such hearts of stone there in the world could be!"

* * * * *

" Beloved moment! then 't was first I caught
The first foundation of romantic thought."

* * * * *

" I hied me to the thick o'erarching shade,
And there on mossy carpet listless laid,
While at my feet the rippling runnel ran,
The days of wild romance antique I'd scan,
Soar on the wings of fancy through the air,
To realms of light, and pierce the radiance there."

The heart of any child would be touched with such ditties, but while the rest returned to their play, the future poet alone would retire into solitude to muse upon them; and think, and feel, till he could feel and think no longer, over such a stanza as this in the rude old ballad, when the villain had left the children in the wood, under pretence of going to the town to bring them bread, for which they were crying: —

" These pretty babes, with hand in hand,
Did wander up and down,

But *never more* could *see* the man,
*Approaching* from the town!"

These are lines which none but a poet by nature could make, and they are such lines as make poets. From the same juvenile composition we learn that Kirke White was early acquainted with Spenser and Milton. Describing his evening walks with a favourite school-fellow, he says,—

" To gaze upon the clouds, whose colour'd pride
Was scatter'd thinly o'er the welkin wide,
And tinged with such variety of shade,
To the charm'd soul sublimest thoughts convey'd.
— In these, what forms romantic did we trace,
While fancy led us o'er the realms of space!
*Now we espied the thunderer in his car,*
*Leading the embattled seraphim to war;*
Then stately towers descried, sublimely high,
In Gothic grandeur frowning on the sky;
Or saw, wide-stretching o'er the azure height,
A ridge of glaciers, in mural white,
Hugely terrific!"

Any eye might build castles in the clouds, or discover towers and glaciers amidst the pomp of sunset; but the imagination of the poet alone, fired with the first perusal of Milton, would discern in them the battle array of the seraphim, and the war in heaven, when

" Forth rush'd, with whirlwind sound,
The chariot of paternal Deity,
Flashing thick flames;"

and especially that wonderful couplet, in which the approach of Messiah is described: —

" Attended with ten thousand, thousand saints,
He onward came: —*far off* his coming *shone!*"

I have laid emphasis on the latter clause, in which, with five of the plainest words that our language contains, "the poet blind yet bold" has struck out, condensed, and displayed, with unsurpassable effect, one of the most magnificent images to be found even in Paradise Lost: —

" *Far off his coming shone!*"

The memory of Henry Kirke White has been embalmed rather by the genius of his biographer (Dr. Southey) than his own. He was, unquestionably, a youth of extraordinary promise; but it must be acknowledged, that he has left little which would have secured him more than a transient reputation, if his posthumous papers had fallen into other hands than those of the best-natured of critics and the most magnanimous of poets. There is no great infusion, in his most finished pieces, of fine fancy, romantic feeling, or fervid eloquence. Their distinguishing characteristics are good sense and pious sentiment, strongly enforced, and sometimes admirably expressed; indeed the cast of his thought was rather didactic, than either imaginative or impassioned. Nevertheless, some of his fragments of verse, penned occasionally on the backs of mathematical exercises at college, in fits of inspiration, show that the spirit was far from being quenched within him, after he had formally abandoned poesy as a pursuit; but that, in sickness, solitude, and studies the most

difficult and uncongenial, the hidden fire burned more intensely for repression, and now and then flashed out portentously. The following lines, though the second is lame, and the cold critic might perhaps find fifty faults in them, are strikingly sublime. There is a veil of obscurity upon them, like that which hides the secrets of the eternal world: —

" Once more, and yet once more,
I give unto my harp a dark-woven lay:
— I heard the waters roar,
I heard the flood of ages pass away."

" O thou stern spirit, that dost dwell
In thine eternal cell,
Noting, grey chronicler! the silent years,
I saw thee rise, — I saw thy scroll complete;
Thou spakest, and at thy feet
The universe gave way!" * * *

It was well that the author left this sketch unfinished; another line might have let it down from " the highest heaven of invention," in which it had been conceived, and into which the mind of the reader is rapt in the endeavour to decipher the hieroglyphic hint. Henry died at the age of twenty-one years. In some rough blank verses, composed long before his decease, he thus anticipated an early grave: —

" Ay, I have planned full many a sanguine scheme
Of earthly happiness; * * * *
And it is hard
To feel the hand of Death arrest one's steps,
Throw a chill blight on all one's budding hopes,
And hurl one's soul untimely to the shades,
Lost in the gaping gulf of blank oblivion.

— Fifty years hence, and who will think of Henry?
Oh, none! — another busy brood of beings
Will shoot up in the interim, and none
Will hold him in remembrance. —
" I shall sink,
As sinks a stranger in the crowded streets
Of busy London; — some short bustle's caused,
A few enquiries, and the crowd close in,
And all 's forgotten."

This may be very meagre poetry, but the sentiments, in connection with the author's subsequent history, are exceedingly affecting. The very remarkable simile at the conclusion, familiar as it seems, I believe to be perfectly original; and the moral may be extended beyond its personal application here. What is the date of fame itself, and the circumstances accompanying it, more than the death of a stranger in the public streets of a great city, occasioning a momentary interruption in a perpetual crowd? a few enquiries and exclamations, then all goes on again as it hath done for centuries past, on that very spot, and may go to the world's end!

The crown of Kirke White's labours in verse was a solitary book of " The Christiad," a sacred poem on the sufferings and death of our Saviour. In reference to this, his kind-hearted biographer observes, — " I cannot refrain from saying, that the two last stanzas (of this fragment) greatly affected me, when I discovered them written on the leaf of a different book, and apparently long after the first canto; and greatly shall I be mistaken if they do not affect the reader also. They are these: —

'Thus far have I pursued my solemn theme,
With self-rewarding toil; — thus far have sung
Of godlike deeds, far loftier than beseem
The lyre which I, in earlier days, have strung:
— And now my spirits faint; and I have hung
The shell that solaced me in saddest hour
On the dark cypress! and the strains which rung
With Jesus' praise, their harpings now are o'er,
Or, when the breeze comes by, moan, and are heard no more.

* * * * *

'And must the harp of Judah sleep again?
Shall I no more re-animate the lay?
Oh! Thou, who visitest the sons of men!
Thou, who dost listen when the humble pray!
'One little space prolong my mortal day;
One little lapse suspend thy last decree;
I am a youthful traveller in the way;
And this slight boon would consecrate to Thee,
Ere I with death shake hands, and smile that I am free.'"

These were probably the last stanzas the dying poet ever penned, for it pleased God to grant him a higher boon than that for which he prayed: — he asked for life, and he received immortality.

### *Robert Burns,*

"The Ayrshire Ploughman," as he was first called — or Burns, as he shall for ages be known by a monosyllable, that will need neither prefix nor adjunct to designate to whom "of that ilk" it belongs,— Burns was so truly a *born-poet* (if ever there were one), that whatever tended to develope his powers must be

peculiarly interesting and instructive, to all who love to trace in "the minstrel" the "progress of genius;" while, in this place, I trust that it will, in some measure, elucidate the main principles which I have endeavoured to establish in these papers respecting poetry and poets. Religion, patriotism, and love were, in succession or in combination, the inspirers of the poetry of Robert Burns: — when he wrote on other themes, he too frequently desecrated the talents which their sublimer impulses had awakened, trained, and perfected. In broad humour, too, and keen satire, he excelled. It is true, that in both of these he went grievously astray; yet, amidst the rudest extravagances of either, that intensity of feeling, which belonged to the higher sentiments above mentioned, often broke out in sallies of noble thought and splendid imagination; which showed that his spirit had not lost "all its original brightness," when it seemed most "fallen."

The letter which he addressed to Dr. Moore, soon after his appearance as an author, in which he gives an account of his early life, proves that *religion* made a powerful impression on his mind, in the very dawn of infancy; of course, it must have influenced, in a high degree, the growth and character of his genius. Several of the most beautiful and affecting stanzas in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," in which the bard is known to have described the felicities of his father's fireside, touch upon the principal subjects of Holy Writ with such truth and pathos, as to leave no doubt that "the Day-spring from on high," which shines through the Psalms and the Prophecies, had

lighted up his young imagination; while the simplicity of evangelical narrative and the fervency of apostolic teaching had captivated his soul, and engaged the finest sensibilities of a heart not yet corrupted by commerce with a profligate world. To the cherished remembrance of early devotional enjoyments, and to a happy talent for imitating the language of the sacred penmen, the best productions of Burns are indebted for much of their energy of expression and elevation of ideas,— their purity, tenderness, and force.

But the wild minstrelsy of his native land, unrestrained and irregular, and infinitely variable, — confined, indeed, within a narrow circle, but that circle a magic one; and limited to a single key, but that key having a *minor* third of passing sweetness, — contributed likewise to rouse his fancy, exercise his feelings, and enrich his memory with images and sentiments at once noble and natural; while its melodies, that flowed around him, were mingled in his ear and associated in his thoughts, with all the harmonies of nature heard amidst forests and mountains, — the music of birds, and winds, and waters, which they resembled in unmeasured fluency and spontaneous modulation. Then, too, the tales of tradition, which he listened to from the lips of an ancient beldame, made him the inhabitant of an imaginary world, wherein all that

> " Fable yet had feigned or fear conceived"

was realised to him; for he was a thoughtful and solitary boy, and, in solitude and thought, he peopled

every scene that was dear and familiar to his eye with spirits and fairies, witches and warlocks, giants and kelpies. It is evident, from almost all his pieces, that it was his delight, indeed it was his *forte*, to *localise* the personages of his poetry, — whether the offspring of his brain, like *Coila*, supernatural beings, like the *dancers* in Kirk Alloway, or national heroes, like *Wallace* and *Bruce*,— with the very woods, and hills, and streams which he frequented in his boyhood. And in his mind this assimilation was so lively and abiding, that there are few of his descriptions — descriptions in number, diversity, and picturesque features seldom equalled — on which he has not cast such sunshine of reality, that we cannot doubt that they had their prototypes in nature, and not in nature only, but in his native district; for neither his knowledge nor his affections were ever carried far beyond the province of his birth; and beyond Scotland they scarcely extended at all. It is probable that the mind of every one of us lays the scenes of Scripture narrative, of history, of romance, of epic poetry, in fact of all that we hear or read of, — in the places where we spent our childhood and youth; as, for example, the garden of Eden in our father's orchard, where there were many fruit trees; the battle of Cannæ on the wide common, intersected with trenches, where a conflict is said to have been fought between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians in the civil war; the enchanted castle of some stupendous giant to have stood on the hill where the ruins of a Saxon tower rise on a mount out of a thick wood; and the pursuit of Hector by Achilles round

Troy walls, as having taken place about the nearest market town that we knew when we first read Homer. Each individual, of course, will have a different series of mnemonics of this kind, which he will find himself continually associating with the scenes of great events in the world's records and traditions. It is of some advantage, then, to the poet, that the features of the landscapes amidst which he first dwelt, but more especially those of the neighbourhood where he long went to school, should afford rich and plastic materials, which imagination can diversify a million-fold, and so accommodate as to make them the perpetual theatre of all that he has been taught to remember concerning those who have lived before him, and all that he invents to increase the pleasures of memory, to those that shall come after him. For it is not from the real and visible presence of things that the poet copies and displays; wherever he is, whatever climes he sees, his "heart" is "still untravelled;" and it is from the cherished recollections of what early affected him, and could never afterwards be forgotten, (having grown up into ideal beauty, grandeur, and excellence in his own mind,) that he sings, and paints, and sculptures out imperishable forms of fancy, thought, and feeling. In this respect, all the compositions of Burns are homogeneous. He is in every style, in every theme, not only the patriot, the Scotchman, — but the Scotchman, the patriot of *Ayrshire;* so dear and indissoluble are the ties of locality to minds the most aspiring and independent.

Burns, according to his own account, was distin-

guished in childhood by a very retentive memory. In the stores of that memory we discover the hidden treasures of his muse, which enabled her, with a prodigality like that of nature, to pour forth images and objects of every form, and colour, and kind, while, with an economy like that of the most practised art, she selected and combined the endless characteristics of pleasing or magnificent scenery, with such simplicity and effect, under every aspect of sky or season, that the bard himself seems rather to be a companion pointing out to the eye the loveliness or horror of a prospect within our own horizon, than the enchanter creating a fairy scene visible only to imagination. He appears to invent nothing, while in truth he exercises a much higher faculty than what is frequently called invention, but which is little more than an arbitrary collocation of things, harmonious only when arranged by the hand that built the universe, or faithfully copied from original models of that hand by an earthly one, which presumes not to add a lineament of its own. The genius of Burns, like his native stream, confined to his native district, reflects the scenery on "the Banks of Ayr" with as much more truth and transparency than factitious landscapes are painted in the opaque pages of more ostentatious poets, as the reflections of trees, cottages, and animals are more vivid and diversified in water than the shadows of the same objects are on land.

While yet a child, in addition to his school-learning, the Life of Hannibal, and afterwards the History of Wallace, fell into his hands. These were the first books that Burns had read alone, — and in all the

luxury of solitary indulgence, he stole away from toil and from pastime to enjoy them without interruption. These were also the books best suited to his genius at that age: they awoke the boldest energies of his mind, and kindled an inextinguishable flame of heroic ardour and patriotic devotion in his bosom. The child became a soldier immediately, as every lad does in his turn:—the drum and the bagpipe spake a new language to his ear, and were answered in corresponding tones from the recesses of his heart. He left his boyish sports, and strutted after the recruiting sergeant in the spirit of Hannibal over-running Italy, or Wallace repelling the ravagers of his country, Thus, the character of grandeur was stamped upon his soul while it was soft in the mould: he became a hero before he was a man; and, which was of much greater consequence to his future glory, before he was a lover. His genius was hewn out of the quarry with the strength and proportions of a Hercules: love, indeed, afterwards touched it down into a gentler form, but love himself could not reduce it to an Adonis; the original majesty remained after the original ruggedness had been chisseled away. The graces may be added to the noblest character without degrading it, but when they precede the heroic virtues they preclude them. Two stanzas from "The Cotter's Saturday Night" will exemplify the style of his patriot poetry:—

"O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!
For whom my warmest wish to heaven is sent,
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content;

And O may heaven their simple lives prevent
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile;
Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace may rise the while,
And stand, a wall of fire, around their much-loved isle.

" O Thou, who pour'd the patriotic tide,
That stream'd through Wallace's undaunted heart,
Who dared to nobly stem tyrannic pride,
Or nobly die, the second glorious part;
The patriot's God peculiarly Thou art,
His friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward;
O never, never Scotia's realm desert;
But still the patriot and the patriot-bard,
In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard."

Love at length found *him*, who was to be pre-eminently the poet of love. Then, as the morning mists, when they retire from the risen sun, leave the landscape more beautiful, diversified, and spacious than the traveller could have supposed it before,—so, when the selfishness of the child and the obstinacy of the boy were dissolved in the growing ardour of youth, Burns discovered a new creation of social feelings and generous sentiments in his soul, all referring to one object, and that the dearest and the loveliest, both to his eye and his fancy, that he had ever yet beheld. Religion had already warmed his affections, and heroism exalted his imagination; love, therefore, found him a prompt disciple, and, unfortunately for his future peace and honour, love soon became lord of the ascendant in his horoscope, and thenceforward the load-star of his genius — the master-passion of his life.

Hitherto he had gazed with admiration on the heavens as displaying the glory of God, and on the earth as being filled with his goodness; while, in more romantic mood, he had imagined his native hills and valleys the Alps overcome and the battle-fields traversed by Hannibal, or had contemplated them as the actual scenes of the achievements and misfortunes of Wallace: now he looked upon the face of nature and of his beloved with the same tenderness and enthusiasm; whatever charms he descried in the features of the one, his lively fancy could attribute to those of the other. Sometimes he saw nature supereminently fair, because its beauties reminded him of her whom, with the idolatry of passion, he adored; again, the beauties of his mistress appeared all perfect, because they reminded him of whatever was lovely and attractive in creation. In her presence, and even in the idea of her presence,—

> "The common air, the earth, the skies,
> To him were opening Paradise." GRAY.

Such joyous emotions as now began to visit his bosom were too restless to be confined there, too exhilarating to be told in ordinary language, and too evanescent to be revealed in verse, without the aid of glowing imagery. Then it was, according to his own scriptural allusion, not profanely intended, that the "poetic genius of his country found him, as the prophet-bard Elijah did Elisha, at the plough, and threw her inspiring mantle over him. She bade him sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes and rural pleasures of his native soil, in his native tongue."

It is not expedient here to pursue his personal history; nor necessary to expose the follies, vices, and sorrows of his latter days. The powers of his mind had grown to their full stature and strength before the period of his well-known and ever-to-be-lamented arrival in Edinburgh. Thenceforward they underwent no extraordinary change either of improvement or deterioration, until their final and premature extinction, after a brief but brilliant career of fame, and a merry but miserable career of dissipation.

As a writer, when worthily employing his talents, Burns is the poet of truth, of nature, and of Scotland. Allusion has already been made to the singular advantages, neither few nor small, which he derived from the privilege of availing himself of the whole vocabulary of his mother-tongue, in addition to the whole scope of the English language. His subjects are never remote, abstracted, or factitious; they are such as come in his way, and therefore shine in his song, as the clouds which meet the sun, are adorned by his rays. His scenery is purely native, and presents the very objects that engaged his attention when the themes with which they are associated were revolving in his mind. The reader sees, hears, feels with the poet in such descriptions as these: —

> "As I stood by yon roofless tower,
> Where the wa' flower scents the dewy air,
> Where the howlet mourns in her ivy bower,
> And tells the midnight moon her care;
> The winds were laid, the air was still,
> The stars they shot along the sky;
> The fox was howling on the hill,
> And the distant echoing vales reply."

A poet ought to have the eye of the deaf, and the ear of the blind, with every other sense quickened in proportion, as though it alone were exercised to supply the deficiency of all the rest. Burns was thus exquisitely organised; and these lines prove it. It is manifest, also, that he wrote less consciously from memory than perception: not after slow deliberation and long choosing, but from instantaneous impulse acting upon abundant and susceptible materials, treasured up for any occasion that might bring them into use. The fire which burns through his poems was not elaborated spark by spark from mechanical friction in the closet. It was in the open field, under the cope of heaven, this poetical Franklin caught his lightnings from the cloud as it passed over him; and he communicated them, too, by a touch, with electrical swiftness and effect. Thus, literally, amidst the inspiration of a thunder-storm, on the wilds of Kenmore, he framed the "Address of Bruce to his Soldiers at Bannockburn," which will only be forgotten with the battle itself; that is, with the glory and existence of his country.

The high praises here bestowed upon the compositions of this author must be confined to the best and the purest in morals and in taste. His ordinary and his satirical ones — I dare not except "Tam O'Shanter," that prodigy of wayward fancy — are so often debased by ribaldry and profaneness, that they can scarcely be perused without shuddering by any one whose mind is not utterly corrupted. The genius of Burns resembled the pearl of Cleopatra, both in its worth and its fortune; the one was moulded by

nature in secret, beneath the depths of the ocean; the other was produced and perfected by the same hand, in equal obscurity, on the banks of the Ayr. The former was suddenly brought to light, and shone for a season on the forehead of imperial beauty; the latter, not less unexpectedly, emerged from the shade, and dazzled and delighted an admiring nation, in the keeping of a Scottish peasant. The fate of both was the same: each was wantonly dissolved in the cup of pleasure, and quaffed by its possessor at one intemperate draught.

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# RETROSPECT OF LITERATURE,

FROM THE EARLIEST PERIOD TO THE TWELFTH CENTURY OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

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N° I.

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*The Permanence of Words.*

An eloquent, but extravagant, writer has hazarded the assertion, that "words are the only things that last for ever."* Nor is this merely a splendid saying, or a startling paradox, that may be qualified by explanation into common-place; but with respect to man, and his works on earth, it is literally true. Temples and palaces, amphitheatres and catacombs—monuments of power, and magnificence, and skill, to perpetuate the memory, and preserve even the ashes, of those who lived in past ages — must, in the revolutions of mundane events, not only perish themselves by violence or decay, but the very dust in which they perished be so scattered, as to leave no trace of their material existence behind. There is no security be-

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* The late Mr. William Hazlitt.

yond the passing moment for the most permanent, or the most precious of these; they are as much in jeopardy as ever, after having escaped the changes and chances of thousands of years. An earthquake may suddenly ingulph the pyramids of Egypt, and leave the sand of the Desert as blank as the tide would have left it on the sea-shore. A hammer in the hand of an idiot may break to pieces the Apollo Belvedere, or the Venus de'Medici, which are scarcely less worshipped as miracles of art in our day, than they were by idolaters of old as representatives of deities.

Looking abroad over the whole world, after the lapse of nearly six thousand years, what have we of the past but the words in which its history is recorded? What beside a few mouldering and brittle ruins, which time is imperceptibly touching down into dust,—what, beside these, remains of the glory, the grandeur, the intelligence, the supremacy of the Grecian republics, or the empire of Rome? Nothing but the words of poets, historians, philosophers, and orators, who being dead yet speak, and in their immortal works still maintain their dominion over inferior minds through all posterity. And these intellectual sovereigns not only govern our spirits from the tomb by the power of their thoughts, but their very voices are heard by our living ears in the accents of their mother-tongues. The beauty, the eloquence, and art of these collocations of sounds and syllables, the learned alone can appreciate, and that only (in some cases) after long, intense, and laborious investigation; but as thought can be made to transmigrate from one

body of words into another, even through all the languages of the earth, without losing what may be called its personal identity,—the great minds of antiquity continue to hold their ascendancy over the opinions, manners, characters, institutions, and events of all ages and nations, through which their posthumous compositions have found way, and been made the earliest subjects of study, the highest standards of morals, and the most perfect examples of taste, to the master-minds in every state of civilised society. In this respect, the "words" of inspired prophets and apostles among the Jews, and those of gifted writers among the ancient Gentiles, may truly be said to "last for ever."

Words are the vehicles by which thought is made visible to the eye, audible to the ear, and intelligible to the mind of another; they are the palpable forms of ideas, without which these would be intangible as the spirit that conceives, or the breath that would utter them. And of such influence is speech or writing, as the conductor of thought, that, though all words do not "last for ever," and it is well for the peace of the world, and the happiness of individuals, that they do not,—yet even here every word has its date and its effect; so that with the tongue or the pen we are continually doing good or evil to ourselves or our neighbours. On a single phrase expressed in anger or affection, in levity or seriousness, the whole progress of a human spirit through life—perhaps even to eternity—may be changed from the direction which it was pursuing, whether right or wrong. For in nothing is the power and indestructibility of words

more signally exemplified than in small compositions, such as stories, essays, parables, songs, proverbs, and all the minor and more exquisite forms of composition. It is a fact, not obvious perhaps, but capable of perfect proof, that knowledge, in all eras which have been distinguished as enlightened, has been propagated more by tracts than by volumes. We need but appeal, in evidence of this, to the state of learning in our own land at the present day, when all classes of people are more or less instructed. On this point I shall have a future opportunity of expatiating, and will therefore, at present, offer only two examples of the permanence of words, involving sacred or important truth, of equal value and application, in all periods and countries, and among all people to whom they may be delivered.

In the youth of the Roman Commonwealth, during a quarrel between the patricians and plebeians, when the latter had separated themselves from the former, on the plea that they would no longer labour to maintain the unproductive class in indolent luxury, Menenius Agrippa, by the well-known fable of a schism in the human body, in which the limbs mutinied against the stomach, brought the seceders to a sense of their duty and interest, and reconciled a feud, which, had it been further inflamed, might have destroyed the state, and turned the history of the world itself thenceforward into an entirely new channel, by interrupting the tide of events which were carrying Rome to the summit of dominion. The lesson which that sagacious patriot taught to his countrymen and contemporaries, he taught to all

generations to come. His fable has already, by more than a thousand years, survived the empire which it rescued from premature destruction.

The other instance of a small form of words, in which dwells not an immortal only, but a divine spirit, is that prayer which our Saviour taught his disciples. How many millions and millions of times has that prayer been preferred by Christians of all denominations! So wide, indeed, is the sound thereof gone forth, that daily, and almost without intermission, from the ends of the earth, and afar off upon the sea, it is ascending to Heaven like incense and a pure offering; nor needs it the gift of prophecy to foretell, that though "Heaven and earth shall pass away," these words of our blessed Lord "shall not pass away," till every petition in it has been answered —till the kingdom of God shall come, and his will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

We now proceed to the immediate purpose of these papers,—to take a brief and necessarily imperfect, but perhaps not altogether uninteresting, retrospect of the history of literature, from the earliest data to the period immediately preceding the revival of letters in modern Europe. I must premise, that the method of handling such an argument in so small a compass, can scarcely be otherwise than discursive and miscellaneous.

### *The general Forms of Literature.*

*Literature*, as a general name for learning, equally includes the liberal arts, and the useful and abstruse

sciences. Philosophy, in this acceptation of the word, is a branch of literature. But literature, in its peculiar sense as distinct from philosophy, may be regarded as the expression of every fixed form of thought, whether by speech or writing. Literature in this view will embrace poetry, eloquence, history, romance, didactics, and indeed every kind of verbal composition, whatever be the subject: all books, in reference to their execution, are literary works; and so are the songs and traditions of barbarians, among whom letters are unknown; the latter, not less than the former, being vehicles for communicating premeditated thought in set terms.

Of literature thus defined, there are two species, verse and prose: and the first takes precedence of the second: for though the structure of ordinary discourse be prose, the earliest artificial compositions, in all languages, have assumed the form of verse; because, as the subjects were intended to be emphatically impressed upon the mind, and distinctly retained in the memory,—point, condensation, or ornament of diction, combined with harmony of rhythm, arising from quantity, accent, or merely corresponding divisions of sentences, were the obvious and elegant means of accomplishing these purposes.

### *Early Poetry.*

The most ancient specimen of oral literature on record, we find in the oldest book—which is itself the most ancient specimen of *written* literature. This is the speech of Lamech to his two wives (in the

fourth chapter of Genesis), which, though consisting of six hemistichs only, nevertheless exemplifies all the peculiarities of Hebrew verse — *parallelism*, *amplification*, and *antithesis*. The passage is exceedingly obscure, and I shall not attempt to interpret it: the mere collocation of words, as they stand in the authorised English Bible, will answer our present purpose: —

" Adah and Zillah! hear my voice;
Ye wives of Lamech! hearken unto my speech."

This is a parallelism, the meaning of both lines being synonymous, though the phraseology is varied, and the two limbs of each correspond to those of the other: —

" Adah and Zillah! | hear my voice;
Ye wives of Lamech! | hearken unto my speech.

" For I have slain a man to my wounding,
And a young man to my hurt."

Here is amplification; — concerning the man slain in the first clause, we have the additional information in the second, that he was "a young man."

" If Cain shall be avenged seven fold
Truly Lamech seventy and seven fold."

The antithesis in this couplet consists not in contrariety, but in aggravation of the opposing terms — seven fold contrasted with seventy and seven fold.

The context of this passage has a peculiar interest, at this time, when the proscription of everlasting ignorance is taken off from the multitude, and know-

ledge is become as much the birthright of the people of Britain as liberty. This Lamech, who, if not the inventor of poesy, was one of the earliest of poets, had three sons; of whom, Jabal, the father of such as dwell in tents, followed agriculture; Jubal, the father of all such as handle the harp and organ, cultivated music; while Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron, practised handicraft. Thus, in the seventh generation of man, in one family we find poetry, music, agriculture, and the mechanical arts. Hence literature, which is connected with the two first, is not inconsistent with the pursuits of the two latter. There are two traditions respecting the second and third of these brethren, each of which may, without impropriety, be introduced here. Of Tubal-Cain, it is said, to borrow the homely verse of Sylvester's Du Bartas, —

> " While through a forest Tubal, with his yew
> And ready quiver, did a boar pursue,
> A burning mountain, from his fiery vein,
> An iron river rolls along the plain:
> The wily huntsman, musing, thither hies,
> And of the wonder deeply 'gan devise:
> And first perceiving, that this scalding metal,
> Becoming cold, in many shapes would settle,
> And grow so hard, that, with his sharpen'd side,
> The firmest substance it would soon divide;
> He casts a hundred plots, and ere he parts,
> He moulds the groundwork of a hundred arts."

There is a classical tradition of the discovery of iron, by a volcanic eruption of Mount Ida, so nearly allied to this, that it may be concluded the one was

borrowed from the other; or, if both had a common origin, the coincidence would almost stamp the authenticity of the fact itself.

Jubal, on the other hand, is reported to have found the upper shell of a tortoise, in which, though the flesh of the animal had perished, the integuments remained. These at his touch trembled into music, giving forth sounds, which suggested the idea of a stringed instrument. He mused a while, then set his fingers to work, and forthwith came the harp out of his hands. This invention has also been celebrated in British verse, but of a higher mood than the strain already quoted: —

" When Jubal struck the chorded shell,
His listening brethren stood around,
And, wondering, on their faces fell
To worship that celestial sound;
Less than a God they thought there could not dwell
Within the hollow of that shell,
That spoke so sweetly and so well."

DRYDEN.

To return to the general subject; —the hemistichs of Lamech, on which we have commented, are only verse in form; neither the voice nor the soul of poetry are there. The next specimen which occurs in Sacred Writ, are the words of Noah, when he awoke from his wine, and knew what his children had respectively done unto him: —

" Cursed be Canaan;
A servant of servants shall he be to his brethren:
Blessed be the Lord God of Shem;
And Canaan shall be *his* servant:

God shall enlarge Japhet,
And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem,
And Canaan shall be *his* servant."

This quotation, in the closing triplet, rises into genuine poetry, by the introduction of a fine pastoral metaphor illustrative of the manner of living among the ancient patriarchs: —

" God shall enlarge Japhet,
And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem."

But these lines are more striking, as exhibiting the first example of the union of poesy and prophecy, for in those primitive days,

——— " the sacred name
Of prophet and of poet were the same."
COWPER.

I have passed over the reputed prophecies of Enoch before the flood, because, though we have a quotation from them in the Epistle of St. Jude, the original language in which they were uttered is either itself extinct, or, if it were the Hebrew, has lost the words that embodied them. It may be observed, however, that the translated extract in the Greek Testament bears tokens of the original having been rhythmical, which is specially indicated by the use of one emphatical word four times in as many lines — a pleonasm that would hardly have occurred in prose composition, even in the age of Adam, but might be gracefully adapted to the cadence and character of the most ancient mode of verse.

Isaac's benedictions on Esau and Jacob are at least

presumptive evidence of the advanced state of oral literature (for writing was probably not yet invented) in his age. The critics, I believe, do not allow the language to have the decided marks of Hebrew rhythm. If so, the passage may be, without hesitation, set down as the oldest specimen of *prose* in the world.

Of the words of dying Jacob, however, there is no question, that the structure of them is verse, and the substance of them at once poetry and prophecy of the highest order. It might seem, from the power of the sentiments and the brilliancy of the illustrations, as though the patriarch on his dying couch, surrounded by his mourning family, were again caught up into the visions of God — as when in his youth he lay alone on the earth, in the wilderness, and saw the angels of God ascending and descending upon a ladder, that reached from his stone pillow into the heavens; for here, in his last accents, it is even as if he had learned the language, and spake with the tongues of angels, — so fervent, pure, and abundant in wisdom and grace are the words of his lips, and the aspirations of his heart. One extract will suffice: —

" Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

" The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and to him shall the gathering of the people be.

" Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt

unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes with the blood of grapes.

" His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."

*The whole of this imagery might be engraven in hieroglyphics;* but not one of the sister arts alone can do it justice, for it combines the excellencies of all three, — picture to the eye, music to the ear, poetry to the mind.

### *Early Eloquence.*

The death of Jacob brings us to the year 2315 from the creation, and consequently includes the earliest era in profane history, of which any authentic records remain concerning those celebrated nations of antiquity, among whom arts and sciences flourished while Greece and Italy were yet unpeopled or unknown. It has been intimated that verse was antecedent to prose in the progress of literature. It is true, that in the book of Genesis, many conversations are given; and in various instances, no doubt, the very words employed by the speakers have been preserved; but none of these having been artificially constructed for the purpose of identifying and perpetuating the sentiments with the phraseology, they come not under that definition of literature which has been assumed in this Essay; — in fact, they are themselves integral portions of a literary work; namely, the first book of Moses, which belongs to a later period. Undoubtedly traditions of what had been said, as well as what had been done, by patriarchs

and eminent personages, were perpetuated in families through all generations, from Adam downward; but, as it was enough for the purposes of tradition, that events and discourses should be *substantially* true, every one who repeated either would do so in his own language, rudely or eloquently, according to his taste or talent. Indeed, to sum up in a few sentences what had been delivered in a long dialogue, it was so far from being necessary, that it was obviously impossible to use the actual words of the speakers, even if they had been remembered.

In one instance, however, without violating probability, an exception may be made in favour of the speech of Judah to Joseph, when he and his brethren had been brought back to Egypt by the stratagem of putting the silver cup into Benjamin's sack. This address is perhaps the finest piece of pleading ever reported, though nothing can be more simple and inartificial than the diction and arrangement of the whole. In truth, it is little else than a family history, with the principal incidents of which Joseph himself was well acquainted, and in the most afflictive of which he had borne his bitter part. There is, moreover, a dramatic interest in the scene, arising from the reader's being in the secret of Joseph's consciousness; and thence knowing that the force of every fact and argument was far more searching and heart-melting to the hearer, than the speaker himself could imagine, from his ignorance of the person whom he was addressing. I must not quote more than one paragraph, referring to a conversation between them

on their former visit to Egypt. Judah says to Joseph: —

"My Lord asked his servants, saying, — Have ye a father or a brother? And we said unto my Lord, — We have a father, an old man — and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, — and his father loveth him."

Is not this the voice of nature speaking with human lips, and speaking to all the affections that make life precious? — "an old man" — "a father" — "a child of his old age" — "a little one" — "whose brother was dead" — "he left alone of his mother, and his father loveth him." Love, in man at least, can go no further, — in woman perhaps it may. Now, as Judah must be supposed to have prepared his appeal for this interview, the speech itself may be considered as the earliest specimen of eloquence; and surely, in its kind, it has never been surpassed. I have dwelt the more on this specimen, because it is the model of almost every other regular speech that can be found in the Sacred Scriptures. In these, recapitulatory narrative brings home to the hearers the peculiar deduction which the speaker would establish; having, as it were, by lines of circumvallation, completely secured access to every point of attack at once, he carries by storm at last the object of his harangue. The whole book of Deuteronomy furnishes a series of such historical arguments; Moses therein addressing, as with the living voice, the people whom he had brought out of Egypt, and led during forty years in the wilderness. And these consecutive

discourses *were* probably *so* delivered to the tribes bodily assembled from time to time, to receive instruction from the lips of a legislator, who could call the heavens and the earth to be his auditors, and say with authority, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain; my speech shall distil as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass."

Joshua's exhortation to the elders before his death; Samuel's remonstrance with the Israelites for their perverseness in demanding a king; Solomon's speech to the people before the dedication of the temple; Daniel's confession of the sins of the captives in Babylon, and their forefathers; Ezra's prayer after the return of the Jews to their own land, laid desolate; and, in the New Testament, Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost; Stephen's discourse before the Sanhedrim; and Paul's two defences before the council, and before Agrippa:—These are all of the same class of oratory, in which the details are *long*, the arguments *brief*, and the conclusion *personal;* so that this peculiar mode of eloquence may be traced for two thousand years; and probably, from its plainness and energy of application, was usual among all the eastern people.

But whatever may be conjectured concerning artificial prose before the invention of writing, it is certain that verse existed from the infancy of the world, and was employed for history, laws, chronology, devotion, oracles, love, war, fables, proverbs, and prophecy,—indeed, for every combination of thoughts, which were intended to be long and well remembered.

*Invention of Letters.*

Having now arrived at that period, where sacred and profane history meet,—the former, like a clear stream issuing from a known fountain, and defined along its whole course through a peopled and cultivated region; the latter, dimly and slowly disentangling its mazes from the shades of impenetrable forests,

" Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,"—
BYRON.

but henceforward widening, deepening, brightening on its way,—the first subject that claims our attention is the learning of the Egyptians, of which much has been said and little is known. The testimony, however, of all antiquity, as well as the superb and stupendous monuments of architecture, and traces of literature in the shape of hieroglyphics and symbols, however unintelligible, prove that they were a wonderful people for gigantic enterprise and indefatigable industry, in achieving what were then the highest feats of manual, intellectual, and mechanic power. On these we shall not expatiate here, as another opportunity will be afforded in the next paper of this series, of considering by whom, and by what means, such marvellous works were executed. At present we shall only allude to them generally, in connection with the discovery of alphabetical writing. When, where, and by whom, letters were invented, it is now in vain to imagine. Notwithstanding the pretensions of Hermes Trismegistos, Memnon, Cadmus, and

others, the true history, nay even the personal existence of these supposed claimants, must be ascertained before the unappropriated honour can be conceded to any one of them. It may, meanwhile, be affirmed, as one of those circumstances humbling to human pride that occasionally occur in history, and which, while they strangely stir the imagination, awaken sublime but melancholy reflection in minds given to muse upon the vanity and mortality of all the things that are done under the sun,—it may be affirmed, as one of these humbling circumstances, that the man who conquered the greatest trophy ever won from fate and oblivion, lost his own name, after divulging the secret by which others might immortalise theirs. As a figure of speech, one may be allowed to wish that the first letters in which he wrote that name, whether with a pen of iron on granite, or with his finger in sand, had remained indelible. But his own invention is his monument, which, like the undated and uninscribed pyramid, will remain a wonder and a riddle to the end of the world.

It is allowed, I believe, on all hands, that the Egyptians, from time whereof the memory of man knoweth not to the contrary, possessed three kinds of writing, — hieroglyphical, alphabetical, and, probably, as a link between, logographic, of which latter the Chinese is the only surviving example at this day. Indeed, in all countries where society has emerged from the stagnation of barbarism, and has made but little advance towards civilisation, there have been found evidences of attempts to create a language for the eye, either by figures of things, by arbitrary

symbols of words, or, in the most perfect manner, by the systematic combination of lines forming letters to represent the rudiments of sounds. This assertion might be copiously illustrated, but the limits of the present Essay will permit no more than a cursory mention of the fact.

It has been observed that the Egyptians were in possession of three kinds of letters, — if, indeed, by *letters*, three kinds of *learning* be not typified; for Pythagoras, it is said, as a special favour rarely granted to a stranger, was initiated into these triple mysteries of writing. The hieroglyphic mode was unquestionably the first; but between it and the literal, the affinity is so remote, that the leap over the whole space could scarcely have been taken at once, especially as there is an intervening step so obviously connected with each, and connecting *them* with one another, that it seems almost necessary for invention to have rested, at least for a little while, upon it. When the ambiguity and imperfection of hieroglyphics were felt to be irremediable, the first practical scheme which would suggest itself to the mind, which conceived the happy idea of designating vocal sounds by strokes, in themselves without meaning would be to invent a separate mark for every word; but, as all *the easy forms* would soon be exhausted, it might next occur to make *these* elementary, and adapt them, not to individual words, but to the most common simple sounds of which words were composed. Thus monosyllables would have a single mark; dissyllables two joined together; and polysyl-

lables more or less, according to their audible divisions.

But still this apparatus would be difficult and perplexing from the multitude of signs necessary; till a finer ear, trying syllables more accurately, would unravel sound as Newton's prism unravelled light, and discover its primary intonations as he discovered the primary colours. Thus the alphabet would be gradually developed, and a familiar sign being attached to each letter, a new creation of intelligible forms for embodying thought would arise, where all was silent, dark, and spiritless before. The lumbering, unwieldy logographic machinery is now confined to the unimproving and unimproveable Chinese, whose inveterate characteristic seems to be, that they obtained a certain modicum of knowledge early, which, for thousands of years, they have neither enlarged nor diminished. They have lent out their intellects at simple interest, and have been content to live upon the annual income, without ever dreaming that both capital and product might be immensely increased by being invested in the commerce of minds — the commerce of all others the most infallibly lucrative, and in which the principles of free trade are cardinal virtues.

This theory of the process by which letters were gradually invented, has been actually exemplified in our own day.—A Cherokee chief, having heard that white men could communicate their thoughts by means of certain figures impressed on soft or hard substances, set himself the task of inventing a series of strokes, straight and crooked, up, down, and across,

which should represent all the words in the Indian language. These, however, became so numerous and so refractory in their resemblances, that he must have given up the work in despair, had he not recollected that the sounds, or syllables, of which all words consisted, were comparatively few, though capable of infinite combination. To these, then, he applied his most approved symbols, which, in the course of time, he reduced to two hundred; and, latterly, it is said that he has brought them down as low as eighty; and that by these he can accurately express the whole vocabulary of his mother-tongue. It is to be observed, in abatement of this marvellous effort of a savage mind, that the primary idea of *writing* was suggested to it, not originally conceived by it.

So beneficent to man has been the invention of letters, that some have ascribed it to the immediate instruction of the Almighty, communicated to Moses when the two tables of stone, containing the Decalogue, written by the finger of God, were delivered to him on the Mount. For this there appears to me no evidence that will bear the test of a moment's calm consideration. Of the Supreme Being we know nothing but what He has been pleased to manifest concerning himself in his works and in his word. To the volumes of nature and of revelation man must no more presume to add than to diminish aught. In neither of these can we find that letters were thus miraculously given; it therefore cannot be admitted, nay, it must be rejected, so long as all probability is against the supposition.

Man, in every progressive state of society, however

insulated from the rest of the world, endeavours to express his feelings and perpetuate his actions by imagery or mnemonics of some kind; now these, so long as he continues to improve in knowledge, will, in the same degree, be more and more simplified in form, yet more and more adapted to every diversity and complexity of thought. Nay, it is not too bold to assume, that, thus circumstanced, man, by the help of reasoning, reflecting, and comparing, would as naturally — yea, as necessarily— be led to the invention of alphabetical characters, as the young of animals, when they are cast off by their dams, are led by an ineffable faculty, which we call instinct, to all those functions and habits of life which are requisite both for existence and enjoyment, and which their parents never could exemplify before them during their brief connection. Birds may be imagined to teach their offspring how to eat, to fly, to sing; but no bird ever taught another how to build a nest, — no bird ever taught another how to brood over eggs till they were quickened into life; — yet every linnet hatched this year, will build her nest next spring as perfectly as the first of her ancestors in the bowers of Eden; and, though she never knew a mother's warmth before, so soon as her own first eggs are laid, she will sit upon them, in obedience to a kindly and mysterious law of nature, which will change her very character for the time, inspire her with courage for timidity, and patience for vivacity; imposing on her confinement instead of freedom, and self-denial in the room of self-indulgence, till her little fluttering

family are all disclosed, and reared, and fledged, and flown.

If external circumstances thus conduct every irrational creature, *individually*, to the knowledge and acquirement of all that is necessary for its peculiar state, — it seems to follow, as a parallelism in Providence, that man in society, at one period or another in his progress of improvement in knowledge, would inevitably discover *all* the means by which knowledge might be most successfully obtained and secured; these being as necessary to the rank which he holds in creation, as the respective functions of inferior animals are to their different conditions. I cannot, however, allow it to be said, because I thus state the question, that I derogate from the glory of God, by not attributing immediately to Him, what He has no where claimed for Himself, in the only book written by his command. To Him nothing is impossible; with Him nothing is great or small, easy or difficult. His power is not more magnified by working miracles, than it was by ordaining, or than it is by upholding, the regular course of nature. "There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty giveth him understanding." Is it less, then, to say of the Almighty, that, by the understanding which He gave, man found out the divine art of writing (for divine in this connection it may be called), than to suppose, without any proof, that this art is so super-human, that it could not have been discovered, unless it had been absolutely revealed by the Deity? — No, surely; for though He made man a little lower than the angels, yet hath He crowned him with glory and ho-

nour; and, to speak after the manner of men, the more exalted the creature is found, the more praise redounds to the Creator, who is "God over all, and blessed for evermore."

### *Modes of Writing.*

That the art of writing was practised in Egypt before the emancipation of the Israelites, appears almost certain from their frequent and familiar mention of this mode of keeping memorials. When the people had provoked the Lord to wrath, by making and worshipping the golden calf, Moses, interceding in their behalf, says,—"Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which Thou hast written. And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever sinneth, him will I blot out of my book." * The allusion here is to a table of genealogy, the muster-roll of an army, a register of citizenship, or even to those books of chronicles, which were kept by order of ancient oriental princes, of the events of their reigns, for reference and remembrance. Besides, such a mode of publishing important documents is alluded to, not merely as nothing new, but as if even the common people were practically acquainted with it. "And thou shalt bind them (the statutes and testimonies of the Lord) as a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them

* Exod. xxxii. 32, 33.

upon the posts of thine house, and upon all thy gates." * There are various parallel passages which no cavilling of commentators can convert from plain meaning into paradox.

But not the Egyptians and Hebrews alone possessed this invaluable knowledge, at the time of which we speak (from fourteen to seventeen hundred years before Christ); we have direct and incidental testimony, both in sacred and profane history, that the Phœnicians, Arabians, and Chaldeans, were instructed in the same. The book of Job (whoever might be the author) lays the scene and the season of his affliction about this era, and in the north of Arabia. That extraordinary composition — extraordinary indeed, whether it be regarded as an historical, dramatic, or poetic performance — contains more curious and minute information concerning the manners and customs, the literature and philosophy, the state of arts and sciences, during the patriarchal ages, than can be collected in scattered hints from all later works put together. In reference to the art and the materials of writing then in use, we meet with the following sublime and affecting apostrophe: — "O that my words were now written! O that they were printed (*impressed or traced out*) in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen, and lead, in the rock for ever!"

The latter aspiration probably alludes to the very ancient practice of hewing characters into the faces

* Deut. vi. 8, 9.

of vast rocks, as eternal memorials of persons and events. It is said by travellers, whose testimony seems worthy of credence, that various fragments of such inscriptions, now utterly undecypherable, may be seen to this day in the wildernesses of Arabia Petrea — monuments at once of the grasp and the limitation of the mental power of man; — thus making the hardest substances in nature the depositories of his thoughts, and yet betrayed in his ambitious expectation of so perpetuating them. The slow influences of the elements have been incessantly, though insensibly, obliterating what the chisel had ploughed into the solid marble, till at length nothing remains but a mockery of skeleton letters, so unlike their pristine forms, so unable to explain their own meaning, that you might as well seek among the human relics in a charnel-vault the resemblances of the once-living personages, — or invoke the dead bones to tell their own history, — as question these dumb rocks concerning the records engraven on them.

The passage just quoted shows the state of alphabetical writing in the age of Job, and, according to the best commentators, he describes three modes of exercising it: — " O that my words were now written, — traced out in characters, — in a book composed of palm-leaves, or on a roll of linen! O that they were engraven with a pen of iron on tablets of lead, or indented in the solid rock to endure to the end of time!" Arguing against the perverse sophistry of his friends, that he *must* have been secretly a wicked man, *because* such awful calamities,

which they construed into divine judgments, had befallen him; so fast does he hold his integrity, that, not only with passing words, liable to be forgotten as soon as uttered, does he maintain it; but by every mode that could give his expressions publicity, and ensure them perpetuity, he longs that his confidence in God to vindicate him might be recorded, whatever might be the issue of those evils to himself, even though he were brought down by them to death and corruption, descending not only with sorrow, but with ignominy to the grave; — for, saith he,

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day on the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, though my reins be consumed within me." — Job, xix. 25—27.

Had these words of the patriarch been indeed "engraven with a pen of iron on the rock for ever," yet without some more certain medium of transmission to posterity, they would have been unknown at this day, or only speaking in the desert with the voice of silence, which no eye could interpret, no mind could hear. But, being inscribed on materials as frail as the leaves in my hand, yet capable of infinitely multiplied transcription, they can never be lost; for though the giant-characters, enchased in everlasting flint, would ere now have been worn down by the perpetual foot of time, yet, committed with feeble ink to perishable paper, liable "to be crushed before the moth," or destroyed by the touch of fire or water, the good man's hope can never fail, even

on earth; it was "a hope full of immortality;" and still through all ages, and in all lands, whilst the sun and moon endure, it shall be said by people of every kindred and nation, and in every tongue spoken under heaven, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

### *Sacred Literature.*

We must here conclude what the limits of this brief essay will permit to be said respecting the literature of the Bible, the first five books of which contain examples of every species of writing and discourse in use among the Jews — poetry and prose, eloquence, ethics, legislation, history, biography, prophecy. It may be added, that the narrative portions especially are of inimitable simplicity; they breathe a pathos, and at times exercise a power over the affections, which no compositions extant beside them have equalled, except some passages of rare occurrence in the subsequent books of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. The historian presents men, manners, and incidents to the eye, the mind, and the sympathies of the reader, precisely in the way that they impressed his own. This is the uniform style of the inspired penman in his highest mood: — "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." — Gen. i. 1—3.

In scenes of common life, and the intercourse between man and man, nothing can be more delicately true to nature, than the light touches of a hand that could sketch such a scene as the following; — the picture composed of words having this advantage over any picture drawn with lines and colours; that, whereas the latter can exhibit but one moment, and only imply discourse, the former can express motion, speech, and progress — the beginning, middle, and end of the action represented. How graceful, and yet how emphatic, are the Oriental pleonasms in Jacob's reply to Pharaoh's simple question!

"And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

"And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, 'How old art thou?'

"And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage!'

"And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh." *

Of the remaining books of Scripture (all of which are more or less conformed to these primitive models) it will not be expedient to enter into further

* Gen. xlvii. 7—10.

particulars, than to offer an example of the perfection to which the most perfect of all the forms of literary composition was carried by him, who, both as prophet and minstrel, is distinguished by the title of the sweet singer of Israel. Considered merely as an emanation of genius, conceived in the happiest frame of mind, and executed with force and elegance corresponding, — the 104th Psalm may not only be quoted in competition with any other similar product of fine taste, but may, indeed, be placed as the standard by which *descriptive* poetry itself ought to be measured, and estimated as it approaches or falls short of the excellence of such a model. This divine song is a meditation on the mighty power and wonderful providence of God. It begins with an apostrophe to *Him*, as "clothed with honour and majesty, who covereth Himself with light as a garment, who stretcheth out the heavens like the curtain of a tent, who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters, who maketh the clouds his chariot, who walketh upon the wings of the wind."

Then follow exhibitions of Almighty power in creation, when "He laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever;" and in destruction, when, at the deluge, "the waters stood above the mountains," but, having accomplished their ministry of wrath, "at (His) rebuke they fled; at the voice of (His) thunder they hasted away."

This scene of devastation is succeeded by one of amenity and fruitfulness, exquisitely delineated:— "He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of

the field; the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches." The earth is represented as pouring forth from her lap the abundance of food for man and beast. The habits of various animals are accurately noted. The revolutions of the heavenly bodies, bringing day and night, and the change of seasons, are next reviewed, and celebrated in strains rivalling their own, when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Afterwards the great and wide sea, in its depths, is disclosed, and exhibited as a world of enjoyment as infinitely extended as the endless diversities of its strange population of living things innumerable, "both great and small."

One passage, and but one more, must not be passed over, the picturesque reality of which will be perceived by all who have a heart to feel horror, or an eye to rejoice in beauty:—"Thou makest darkness, and it is night; wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.—The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.—The sun ariseth; they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens.—Man goeth forth unto his work and his labour until the evening.—O Lord! how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all."

The remaining unquoted passages of this Psalm are worthy of the foregoing, especially the verses which describe animal life, death, and resuscitation, by the breathing, withdrawing, or regenerating influence of that Divine Spirit, which at first "moved

upon the waters." Who, after reading the whole of this sublime strain, can forbear to exclaim with the royal Psalmist, at the close:—"Bless *Thou* the Lord, O *my* soul!" and then invoke all living to do the same—"Praise *ye* the Lord."

A

# RETROSPECT OF LITERATURE, &c.

## N° II.

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### *Literature of the Hindoos.*

ALTHOUGH the modern Hindoos are generally distinguished by deplorable mental as well as bodily imbecility, they are the descendants of ancestors not less conspicuous both for intellectual and physical power. Learning is said to have flourished in India before it was cultivated in Egypt, and some have assumed that it was from beyond the Indus that the Nile itself was first visited with the orient beams of knowledge. The modern Hindoos, however, in their unutterable degradation, are only careful to preserve the monuments of their forefathers' glory and intelligence in the stupendous ruins, or, rather, in the imperishable skeletons of their temples, and in their sacred and scientific books. But the latter being wholly in the hands of the Brahmins, few of whom understand much of their contents, are impregnably sealed from the researches of the multitude.

The astronomical tables of the ancient Indians are yet the admiration of Europeans, considering the disadvantages under which they were framed; and if there remained no other discernible traces of learning, these would mark a high degree of civilisation among the people that could calculate them. Dwelling, like their contemporaries the Chaldeans and Babylonians, in immense plains, where, over an unbroken circle of horizon below, a perfect hemisphere of sky was expanded above, they watched the motions of the stars, while they guarded their flocks by night, and learned to read with certainty, in the phases of the heavens, the signs of times and seasons useful to the husbandman and the mariner. But, unsatisfied with these, they vainly endeavoured to find out what the heavens could not teach — the destinies of individuals and the revolutions of empires.

The sacred books of the Hindoos, which are yet preserved, (so far as their authenticity can be deemed probable, and their institutes have been explored,) display a corresponding elegance of style, simplicity of thought, and purity of doctrine, in all these respects differing essentially from the monstrous fables, the bloody precepts, and shocking abominations with which their more modern writings abound. The affinity between the architecture and hieroglyphics of India and Egypt indicates the common origin of both, and almost necessarily implies the senior claims of the former; for science, like empire, has uniformly travelled westward in its great cycle, whatever occasional retrogradation may have been caused by dis-

turbing forces. Egypt, with all its wonders, can boast nothing so magnificent as the Caves of Elora, consisting of a series of temples, sixteen in number, a mile and a half in length, and each from a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet in breadth, with heights proportioned, all sculptured out of the live rock by labour incalculable, and with skill only equalled by the grandeur of the edifices on which they have been expended. Edifices, however, they are not, in the proper sense of the word. The men of those days found in the heart of their country a mountain of granite equal to the site of a modern city. They excavated the solid mass, not building up, but bringing out, like the statue from the marble, the multitudinous design; shaping sanctuaries, with their roofs and walls, and decorating them with gigantic images and shrines, by removing the fragments as they were hewn away, till the whole was presented standing upon innumerable pillars, left in the places where they had been identified with the original block; the range of temples, from the flint pavement to the vaulted roof, being in fact one stone, wrought out of the darkness of its native quarry, open to the sun and pervious to the breeze through all its recesses. It seems as though the master-spirits who planned this work had caught the sublime idea from their own prolific tree, which, casting its boughs on every side, takes fresh root at the extremity of each when it touches the soil, and multiplies itself into a forest from one stem. Milton, from such an architectural tree, represents our first parents, after their fall, as

gathering the ample leaves, "broad as a target," to twine into girdles: —

> "The fig-tree — not that kind for fruit renown'd,
> But such as at this day to Indians known,
> In Malabar or Deccan, spreads her arms,
> Branching so broad and long, that in the ground
> The bended twigs take root, and daughters grow
> About the mother-tree — a pillar'd shade,
> High over-arch'd, and echoing walks between:
> There oft the Indian herdsman, shunning heat,
> Shelters in cool, and tends his pasturing herds,
> At loop-holes cut through thickest shade."

Could the minds that conceived, and the hands that wrought this prodigy of art, have been those of men in their second childhood, — not the second childhood of individuals, but of a people fallen into dotage and decrepitude, like their descendants, under the double curse of tyranny and superstition? No; the ancient Indians were men of mighty bone and mighty intellect, not only according to the evidence of these unparalleled relics of their power, but according to the most authentic testimony of those who have described the expedition of Alexander the Great into this vast region. Whatever were his victories, he saw a boundary there which he was not permitted to pass; and when he left India behind him unsubdued, he had little reason to sigh for other worlds to conquer. Nor (which is principally to our present purpose) was he less thwarted by the philosophers of India, than baffled by its warriors and its climate. These exercised such influence over the people, that the tribes rose in mass to repel the invader, or perish

on the field, or amidst the blazing ruins of their strong-holds, rather than submit, — and thenceforward live under the ban of excommunication from the society of men, which the priests had power to decree, and all the plagues which it was believed the gods would inflict upon the betrayers of their country to a stranger.

In later ages, unfortunately, India *was* subdued,— subdued again and again; and for two thousand years it has been the prey of foreigners. At length, however, in the order of Providence, it has become a province of the British empire; and, by whatever means acquired, it may be confidently asserted that our dominion there must be — I trust will be — maintained by beneficence. Resolutely avoiding all political allusions, I cannot hesitate to say, that a better day has dawned on that land of darkness; yet, before the Hindoo can rise to the dignity of independent man, a spell which has paralysed his spirit for thousands of years must be taken off. The chain of caste must be broken — that subtlest and strongest of chains, at once invisible and indissoluble; *each* link being perfect and insulated, so as to enclose within its little magic circle a distinct class of the community, and prevent the individuals for ever from mingling with those of any other class; while *all* the links are so implicated together as to make *all* the classes one race of captives, dragged, as it were, in perpetual succession, at the chariot wheels of their own Juggernaut, along the broad road of ignorance, debasement, and superstition. This chain must be broken by the gradual association of persons of various

castes in civil, military, commercial, and religious bands, wherein all acting together, and on terms of equality, those fetters which both concatenate and divide them will be worn thinner and thinner by incessant and unregarded attrition, till at length they fall off of themselves.

But it is by schools, in which children are promiscuously educated, whatever be their rank and parentage, that the prejudices of bigotry and the inveteracy of proscription will be most easily and effectually abolished. A great point has been gained within the last thirty years, when seminaries in which European literature (however humble in form) is taught, were first opened, and are now, in many instances, well frequented by boys of all castes, from the sons of the Brahmin to those of the Soudhra: but a still greater step towards native emancipation was taken by a countrywoman of our own, about twelve years ago, who dared to offer instruction to Hindoo females. Their mothers, through a hundred generations, had been held in the bonds of ignorance, and if their posterity had been left for a hundred generations more under the same thraldom and outlawry, the other sex must have remained, by a judicial fatality, as they are, and as they have been,—unimprovable beings, from the hereditary disqualification of caste, which prevents a man from ever being any thing but what his father was, and requires him to entail the monotonous curse upon all his posterity. But now the worst of castes—the *caste of sex*, is broken in India, by the opening of schools for girls in various stations. The work has been begun under

good auspices, and it will go on. The great difficulty was to take the first step: this, a few years ago, was deemed an impossibility; the only impossibility now is, to stop the progress of motion once communicated, and never to cease while the earth rolls in its orbit.

But we must return westward.

### *Literature of the Chaldeans, Babylonians, &c.*

Nations have their infancy, as well as the men and women that compose them. To a child every thing is new and wonderful, and if one of these little curious observers could communicate its minute history, for the first three years, in its own exquisite anomaly of words and ideas, there would be the prettiest fairy-tale that the world ever saw; it would, indeed, defy criticism, but it would delight beyond example every body that had once been a baby, dear to a mother, and who remembered, however imperfectly, those joys and sorrows of the nursery that compose the morning dreams of life, before one awakes to its dull, and cold, and sad realities. In like manner, the first records of every people abound with marvels and prodigies, with crude and terrible traditions, wild and beautiful reveries, fabulous representations of facts, or pure unmingled fiction, with which no truth can amalgamate. Heroes and demigods, giants and genii, evil and good, are the every-day actors of scenes in which supernatural achievements and miraculous changes are the ordinary incidents.

These observations are peculiarly applicable to the

early histories of the celebrated nations of antiquity. There scarcely exists an authenticated fragment of all the learning and philosophy of the Chaldeans, Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians, and Phœnicians, to give posterity, in the present age, matter-of-fact proof that there were such giants of literature in the earth in those days, as we have been taught to believe from the testimony of the more enlightened Greeks, who, after all, appear to have *known* less even than they have *told* concerning these patriarchal people, and to have recorded vague traditions rather than preserved genuine relics of historical records, which had perished in the bulk before their time. It is almost unaccountable, if there were such treasures of knowledge, in Egypt especially, that the philosophers and statesmen of Greece, who travelled thither for improvement, should have acknowledged so little. This circumstance naturally induces suspicion, that what they learned there was either of very small value, or that they were very disingenuous in not registering their obligations. Be this as it may, though there is abundant evidence that in manual arts, as well as in arms, these people of the east were great in their generation, their literature must have been exceedingly defective; otherwise their monuments of thought, no more than their monuments of masonry, could have so perished, as scarcely to have left a wreck behind:—

> "They had no poet, and they died."

There is not in existence a line of verse by Chaldean, Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, or Phœnician bard.

They could embalm bodies, but hieroglyphics themselves have failed to embalm ideas. Yet there was mind, and mind of high order; limited, indeed, in the range of objects on which it was exercised, but expanding itself into immensity upon the few towards which its energies were converged.

It is manifest, from the uniform character of magnificence stamped upon all the ruins of temples, palaces, and cities, as well as from the more perfect specimens of pyramids, obelisks, and sculptures, yet extant in the land of Nile, that a number comparatively small of master-spirits supplied the ideas which myriads of labourers were perpetually employed to embody, and that the learning of the Egyptians was nearly, if not wholly, confined to the priesthood and the superior classes. Moses, indeed, was instructed in it, not because he was the son of a slave, but because he was the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. We have Scripture authority, too, for the fact, that long before the Israelites became bondsmen to the Egyptians, the Egyptians had sold themselves and their land to their king for bread during a seven years' famine. However intellectual then the rulers and hierarchy may have been, who planned those amazing monuments of ambition, the hands which wrought such works must have been the hands of slaves,—slaves held in ignorance as well as servitude. Men free and enlightened never could have been *made* what these evidently *were* — live tools to hew rocks into squares and curves, and pile the masses one upon another by unimaginable dint of strength, and the consentaneous efforts of multitudes,

whose bones and sinews—whose limbs and lives, were always in requisition to do or to suffer what their hierophants or their sovereigns projected.

*Speculation on the Original Use of Hieroglyphics.*

The marvellous relics of Memphian grandeur, of which new discoveries are made by every successive traveller into the desert, or up the river, are melancholy proofs that the vaunted learning of the Egyptians, when it existed, was as much locked up from the comprehension of the vulgar, as it is at this day from the curiosity of the learned in undecypherable hieroglyphics. Had instruction been as general there as it is here, the key to those hieroglyphics could hardly have been lost to posterity. But we are told that a key to the hieroglyphics has been found; and in reference to *alphabetical* hieroglyphics this is true; but that this was the original character of figure-writing, it is difficult to believe; for had it been so, it would probably have been early abandoned, and abandoned altogether, when the simpler forms of lines and curves were adopted to express letters. Had hieroglyphics in the first instance been alphabetical, and employed for purposes of literature, the slowness of the process, and the extent to which documents so written would spread, must have confined their use to tabular and sepulchral inscriptions; for a single copy of the history of Egypt, for example (had such an one been compiled), equal to Hume's History of England, would have required a surface

for transcription scarcely less than the four sides of the great pyramid of Ghizza.

Without, however, entering into any enquiry concerning the value and extent of the recent discoveries of the late Dr. Young, to whom, I believe, the honour belongs, and through him to our country belongs, or M. Champollion, who has most happily followed the clew of which the Doctor found the first loose end for unwinding; — without entering into any enquiry into these exceedingly curious but abstruse and complicated questions, the few following remarks are intended to refer solely to the *antecedent* use of hieroglyphics in Egypt, in the same manner as they have been or are used elsewhere, both in ancient and in modern times; namely, as symbols, not of *letters*, nor of *words*, but of *things*; each of which, though it had a *general* meaning, from which it probably was never dissociated, yet in its *particular* application might be employed as a pure *mnemonic*, and associated with any *special* idea of that class to which it belonged.

Hieroglyphics, in this respect, differed essentially from the systems of modern mnemonics, wherein the association of symbols with things to be remembered by them is *not arbitrary*, and therefore *not capable* of being harmoniously adapted, but fixed, and necessarily incongruous; so that of whatever utility they may be in forming a technical memory, the habit of collocating, and the familiarity of dwelling upon, such heterogeneous materials in the lumber-room of the mind, can have no better effect upon the judgment and the taste than to pervert the one and corrupt the

other. For example: — A lecturer on Mnemonics, in my hearing, proposed something (I forget what) to be remembered in connection with the miraculous conversion of St. Paul. To accomplish this, he had occasion for the letters (or the consonants) composing the words *smilingly*, while, by an unlucky coincidence, the symbol to be employed was *Venus*. "Well, then, ladies and gentlemen," said he, "having ascertained these two points, — the word and the symbol, — you need only imagine that when Saul of Tarsus was struck down to the ground by the light from heaven, the goddess of beauty, in her chariot, drawn by doves through the air, was passing by at that moment, and looked down *smilingly* upon him." To say nothing of the impiety, the absurdity of such an association of images and ideas is so revolting, that the mind which could endure it must be either originally insensible to all that is delicate, beautiful, and true in poetry, painting, and reality, or it would soon be rendered so.

Let us now see how differently, yet how gracefully and appropriately, genuine hieroglyphics may be combined with ideas and images to be remembered by *them*. In the year 1734, three Red Indian chiefs of the Creek nation were admitted to the honour of a formal audience, at Whitehall, with his Majesty George II. On being introduced into the presence, Tomo Cachi, the principal of his tribe, thus addressed the king, presenting at the same time the symbols to which he alluded: — "This day I see the majesty of your face, the greatness of your house, and the number of your people." Then stating the

object of their visit to be "the good of the children of all the nations of the upper and lower Creeks, that they might be instructed in the arts of the English people," he added, "These are feathers of the eagle, the swiftest of birds, and which flieth all round our nations. These feathers are the sign of peace in our land, and have been carried there from village to village, and we have brought them over to leave with you, O Great King! as a sign of everlasting peace." Now had these symbols been delivered to the chief of another tribe of Tomo Cachi's own countrymen, they would have been preserved in memorial of the pacific interview; and *the very words of the speech* that accompanied them would have been so accurately remembered, that on every public occasion, when reference was made to the particular event, the feathers would have been produced, and that speech would have been repeated, the former being made mnemonics of the latter, not by a settled but by an arbitrary association; for *the same feathers* might have been the recording emblems of any other pacific treaty, and combined in remembrance with *any other form of words* uttered at the ratification of it.

Among these Indian tribes, every thing of importance transacted in solemn council between themselves or their white neighbours, is confirmed and commemorated by the delivery or interchange of symbols, which for the most part are strings or belts of wampum. A string consists of a series of square flat pieces of muscle-shell, fastened breadth-wise on a cord or wire: a belt is composed of several of these strings joined side by side, and from three to four

inches wide. The value of each is computed by the number of fathoms contained in the whole length when drawn out. Upon the delivery of *a string*, the speech which accompanies it may be verbose enough, because it is sufficient if *the general meaning* be recollected: but when *a belt* is given, the words must be few and weighty, and *every one of them remembered.* Neither the colour nor the size of the plates which constitute the wampum is indifferent; the black and blue are used when the occasion is one of doubt, rebuke, or contention; the white at amicable meetings: but when defiance is held forth, the pieces of shell are artificially marked with red, the colour of blood, having in the middle the figure of a tomahawk. The Indian women are very ingenious in the invention of significant devices, and expert in the art of weaving the same into the texture of these hieroglyphic belts; every one of which is individually distinguished by some special mark whereby the association of the words delivered with it may be revived, even though all the rest of the emblems upon it were similar to those on other belts, delivered with *other* words at the same time.

Such strings and belts are also documents by which the Indians register the events of their desultory history, and perpetuate the only literature which they have; namely, the verbal terms in which treaties, agreements, and pledges were made between tribes, and families, and private persons. Their national records of this kind are carefully deposited in chests, which are public property. On certain festival days all these are brought forth to refresh the memory of

the aged, and that the young may be instructed in the interpretation of them. On such occasions a large circle is formed by the initiated and their scholars, all sitting on the earth, under the shadow of forest trees around the chest; from which only one length of wampum is taken out at a time, and held up to inspection, while some chieftain or orator (learned in what actually deserves a better name than legendary or traditional lore) not merely explains the circumstances under which it was accepted, but rehearses word for word the very speech delivered with it. The string or belt is then handed round the whole assembly, each marking the length, breadth, colours, and devices upon it, and in his own mind connecting with these the sentences of which *it* is the particular memorial. When all have examined it, and satisfied themselves, this is laid by, and another and another produced, till the whole series has been gone through in like manner. In illustration of the Indian use of such hieroglyphics, the following singular fact is worth attention: —

The wars between the Delawares and Iroquois had been violent and of ancient standing. According to their own accounts, the former were always too powerful for the latter. The Iroquois, fearful of extermination, about a century ago, sent a message to the Delawares, saying,— "It is not profitable for all the Indian nations to be at war with one another, for by this the whole race must be destroyed. We have thought of a plan by which all may be preserved. One tribe shall be the woman. We will place her in the midst, and the others who are wont to quarrel

shall be the man, and live round about her. No one of these shall offend the woman. If any should act so basely, the rest will immediately say,—'Why do you strike the woman?' then they shall all fall upon him who has hurt her and chastise him. The woman herself shall not go to war with any body, but shall be at peace with all, and keep peace among them. Therefore, if the men that surround her fall out, and beat each other, the woman shall run between them, and say,—'Ye men, what are ye about? Why do you wound and kill each other? Your wives and your children must perish if you do this.' Then the angry men shall hearken to the woman, and obey her voice." The Delawares acknowledge, that not being aware of the subtlety of their antagonists, their tribe consented to be the woman. The Iroquois accordingly appointed a great feast, and invited all the Indian nation to attend it. On this occasion their chief orator addressed the representative of their dupes thus:—"We have appointed you, the Delaware tribe, to be the woman among the Indian people. We, therefore, clothe you in a woman's long garment reaching to the ground, and adorn you with ear-rings. We hang a calabash filled with oil, and another filled with medicines upon your arm: with the oil you shall cleanse the ears of the tribes, that they may listen only to good words; and with the medicines you shall heal those who are walking in foolish ways, that they may return to their senses, and incline their hearts to peace. We deliver into your hands a plant of Indian corn, and a hoe, that, as the woman, you may apply yourself to agriculture

and labours at home."—Each of these conditions of the covenant was confirmed by the delivery of a belt of wampum, significant of its particular provisions. For many years afterwards these were faithfully kept in the national chest, and from time to time brought out, when the identical speeches delivered with them were repeated in the ears of the people.

To return to the original use of hieroglyphics among the ancients, — for this mode of registering thoughts was not confined to the Egyptians, — I do humbly conceive that it was precisely the same in principle, though far more comprehensive than the use of the wampum symbols among the Red Indians,—namely, that it was a system of mnemonics, not fixed but optional, and capable of indefinite application. It is generally presumed that each figure had a meaning so determined, that those who were possessed of the key, might unlock the mystery of every combination on systematic principles that could be presented to him. Whether this process were slow or prompt, difficult or easy, is not the question: the practicability of it may reasonably be doubted on this plain ground, — the symbols which compose hieroglyphics are so few, that, in the very nature of things, the ideas which they could clearly express must be few in proportion: and though their combinations might be as infinitely diversified as the combinations of alphabetical signs, yet, as each could have but one fixed meaning, which it would always express, the range of ideas in which it might be introduced must be exceedingly narrow, and nearly all of the same class.

On the other hand, the letters of the alphabet having no meaning at all when alone, but only in combination of syllables, which singly or concatenated form words, it follows, that whatever words can make intelligible to the ear, literal writing can make intelligible to the eye. To this it may be replied, that, if the images in figure-writing were few, yet each represented a whole class of meanings, of which it was the radiating point, or the root, from which not merely a tree, but a forest of thoughts, congenial to one another, branched forth: — in short, that, as the Hebrew language is a language of hieroglyphics, which must be interpreted by tracing the various shapes of signification which the same metaphors assume, according to the exigency of their respective contexts, so a language of figures to the eye may be made to convey as many abstract ideas as those who invent or employ it may choose. This is perfectly practicable upon the principle, by which Indian hieroglyphics are applied to every desirable purpose of reminiscence only. It may not, indeed, be impossible to construct a system of hieroglyphics, in which the meaning, and consequently the application, of every radical should be fixed, and yet so exuberant in diversified scions, as to express whatever the human mind can conceive: — this may not be impossible to construct in theory, but to learn and employ such a language to any considerable extent, would be beyond the power of a finite capacity. The Chinese, of which every mark or logograph resembles a lock of many wards, would present reading-made-easy lessons

for an infant school, in comparison with such pages of Sphynx's riddles.

There are two perfect hieroglyphics on record, with the authorised interpretation of each; and it is pretty evident from these, that the original use of hieroglyphics, before letters were invented, and hieroglyphics themselves were converted into letters, was much the same among the ancients as it is at this day among the American Indians. An inscription over the temple of Minerva, at Sais, presented to the spectator five images — an infant, an old man, a hawk, a fish, a river-horse. The general meaning of the first two is sufficiently obvious; the hawk was the emblem of Deity, the fish was an abomination to the Egyptians, and the hippopotamus was equally abhorred on account of its grossness. We are told, then, that the tablet indicated this: — "Young and old, know that God hates impurity."

Now though these very figures, without violating the general sense of any one of them, might suggest at least as many different readings as the most controverted passage in any ancient author, — yet, taking it for granted that the above was the precise lesson intended to be conveyed, how was it taught? Undoubtedly by a set *form of words, to which the figures were adapted;* and presuming that literal writing was not then invented, we conclude that the figures were employed, and placed in a conspicuous situation, to *remind* the spectators of the sentiment with which they were associated, and which had been publicly explained to every body from the time when the tablet was first exhibited. Had any *other* sen-

timent, at the utmost variance with this, been chosen to be signified by these emblems, the emblems would have reminded those who looked upon them of that sentiment, and that only; no scheme of hieroglyphics, however comparatively perfect, being capable of so conveying abstract ideas by visible images, as to enable every adept in the science to interpret them in the same form of words: and unless this might be done as accurately as by letters, there could be little assurance that any interpretation was the true one,—a circumstance which would go far to invalidate all historical records, (except names and dates, thereby reducing history to mere chronology), for few matters of fact could be *unequivocally* represented.

For example, John *struck* William. Here the persons are the figures of the hieroglyphic, and the verb describes the action which must be manifest from their attitudes. Human ingenuity may be defied to express the precise sense of that one word "struck." You may represent a man striking another, but you can only represent *the attempt* to strike; the finished act cannot be shown, for his arm is in the air; it is only on the way to effect its purpose; but the person in danger from it is on his guard, and he may anticipate the blow, or shrink from it. If you represent the fist of the assailant's hand upon the head at which it was aimed, you cannot make it plain that it was *violently* laid there; of course the spectator cannot be assured that John *struck* William, notwithstanding the ferocious and menacing aspect of the latter, for braggarts sometimes double their fists, and *push* when they dare not *strike*. Again, if to indicate

the past tense, you represent William fallen under the infliction, there will be no direct evidence that he was *knocked* down; he may have slipt, or thrown himself upon the ground to avoid the stroke. If hieroglyphics, even though their practitioners were painters equal to Apelles or Timanthes, be so inadequate to exhibit *actions* by *imagery*, how much more defective must they be to express abstract ideas, which at best could only be doubtful *deductions* from the representations of images and actions in themselves equivocal!

The other instance of a hieroglyphic recorded and interpreted, to which allusion has been made, is not a pictured series, but the things themselves which were employed as symbols to communicate a message of defiance. When Darius Hystaspes had long been carrying on a fruitless war against the Scythians, the enemy sent him a present consisting of a bird, a mouse, a frog, and a bundle of arrows; intimating thereby, that till the Persians could fly through the air like birds, live in the earth like field-mice, or under the water like frogs, they need not hope to escape the Scythian arrows. Is it not plain that a hundred different messages might have been transmitted with the very same emblems to a hundred different persons, each of which could only be understood by the receivers, according to the circumstances of their peculiar situation in respect to the givers; but not even then to be understood unless a verbal interpretation accompanied them, of which the emblems were to be neither more nor less than memorials?

Mexican picture-language and Peruvian knots might be produced in further proof of this conjecture, for I presume not to offer it as more than conjecture, that ancient hieroglyphics were not *originally* the adaptation of figures either to letters or words, but the representation solely of things which, by association, might be made mnemonical signs of any arbitrary collocation of words, generally expressing ideas of that class to which, by convention, the figures themselves belonged. I will offer only one test of an authentic verbal document, probably composed before the invention of alphabetical writing, by which this theory may be put to the proof.

In my last paper I alluded to the blessings of dying Jacob upon his children, and observed that the whole might be converted into a table of hieroglyphics. Every distinct benediction or prophecy, referring to each of his sons in succession, is marked by some strikingly appropriate figure; and, as the very structure of the sentences, even in our English translation, shows that the original composition was verse, and, consequently, a set form of words, the imagery of each clause would very naturally, and very obviously too, constitute the hieroglyphics of the particular sentiment associated with it, and not of that sentiment vaguely, but in the exact terms of the poetic diction in which it had been uttered. Take the blessing on Judah, quoted in our last paper: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise; thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped

down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? — The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.—Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: his eye shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."

Here is an hieroglyphic table in three compartments: in the *first*, under the figures of a lion's whelp, a full grown lion, and a lioness couched among her young, the power and fierceness of a mighty conqueror are shadowed forth; in the *second* appears a sceptre, the sign of sovereignty, to be continued till a greater than Judah shall come; in the *third*, the vintage-scene evidently exhibits the future prosperity and happiness of his descendants in the land promised to their fathers. Now, might not these symbols be engraven and kept in the families of the sons of Jacob, not merely in general remembrance of the blessings appropriated to each of their tribes, but to remind them and their posterity of the *literal language* in which the prophecies were given, and on *the preservation of the words of which* depended the only assurance that the *substantial* truth had not been perverted by loose oral tradition?

We are told that the Egyptian priests inscribed upon pillars, and obelisks, and on the walls of their temples, all the lessons of wisdom and records of past events, which they taught to the privileged few who were their scholars. If the speculations here advanced have their foundation in truth, it is probable that

whatever was thus taught by hieroglyphics was *first* composed in fixed forms of words; and that the mode of teaching from these was not by means of a key which unlocked the secrets of an universal language, but by repeating to the learners premeditated sentences like the Indian speeches, and associating with each of these, as it was impressed upon the memory, the figure or figures corresponding with it in the hieroglyphic series of the whole; then, though thousands might be well versed in the *general signification of* symbols which were in *general use*, none could understand any *particular* arrangement of them except those who were specially instructed in the same. Many might comprehend the scope of each of the blessings indicated in a hieroglyphic series made from Jacob's farewell words, but none, by any imaginable process, except previous instruction, could interpret the figures into the words.*

* The following is a very significant specimen of an Indian hieroglyphic still used: it has frequently been mentioned in ridicule, but it is not without a grave signification: —

" A serpent in a circle, representing eternity. — A tortoise resting on the serpent, being the symbol of strength, or the upholding power. — Four elephants standing on the back of the tortoise, emblems of Wisdom sustaining the earth. — On the top of all the triangle, the symbol of Yoni, and the Creation."

In Oahu, one of the Sandwich Islands, the tax-gatherers, though they can neither read nor write, keep very accurate accounts of all articles of all kinds, collected from the inhabitants throughout the island. This is done principally by one man, and the register is nothing more than a line of cordage from four to five hundred fathoms in length. Distinct portions of this rope are allotted to the various districts, which are known one from another by their relative locality in succession, beginning and ending at one point on the coast, and also by knots,

*Ancient Greek Literature.*

Leaving the interminable, perhaps we ought rather to say the inaccessible, maze of hieroglyphics, though "long detained in that obscure sojourn," we turn to the daylight scenes and pure realities of Greece. To arrive at these, however, we must pass over all the fables of her first ages, borrowed probably from Egyptian mythology, and introduced by Cecrops, the founder of Athens, and perhaps never understood by the Greeks: we must likewise leave behind the generation of heroes which followed that of gods, including among the former the earliest names in profane literature, — Cadmus, who is said to have imported letters from Phœnicia; also the poets Orpheus, Musæus, Linus, Amphion, and others, of whom miracles of song are recorded, which may indeed be allegorical representations of the influence of the fine arts, especially poesy, (the language of superior beings to a barbarous people,) in civilising manners and transforming characters, by awakening, developing, and expanding the intellectual powers of man.

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loops, and tufts of different shapes, sizes, and colours. Each tax-payer in each district has his place and designation in this string, and the number of dollars, pigs, dogs, pieces of sandal-wood, the quantity of taro-root, and other commodities at which he is rated is exactly defined by marks most ingeniously diversified, — which, though formed upon general principles, can only be understood in their application by the resident collector, who has in his mind the topographical picture of the island, and all its districts.

Homer himself lived so much within the undeterminable limit of that doubtful era, when, though it was no longer night, it was not yet day in Greece, that the only date which can be assigned to him is not that of his actual existence, but that of his resurrection from an obscurity which had gathered round his tomb, and would probably for ever have concealed it and all but his name from posterity. Of course the allusion is to that act of Pisistratus, by which he almost redeemed the royal title of tyrant from the obloquy which his usurpation had entailed upon it, when, according to the only history of the period — unwritten tradition, he collected the scattered songs of Homer, and united the loose links into that perfect and inimitable chain in which they have been delivered down to us, most resembling, it may be said, "the golden everlasting chain" celebrated in the Iliad, wherewith the father of the gods bound the earth to his throne; for, in like manner, hath this father of poets, from his "highest heaven of invention" indissolubly bound the world to the sovereignty of his genius.

Whether the poems of Homer, like the "Orlando Innamorato" of Boiardo, as recomposed by Berni, or our national ballad of "Chevy-Chase," as altered and improved by successive hands, were rude but noble lays, refined gradually or at once; or whether they were originally composed in the form which two thousand five hundred years have not been able to amend or deteriorate, — this is a question which it were vain to argue upon here; suffice it to say, that Greek literature, in poetry at least, had reached a

standard which has never been surpassed in the age of Pisistratus, who, as the prototype of Pericles (his imitator both in the career of learning and of ambition), if he deprived his countrymen of their birthright, conferred on them the only earthly advantage that can in any degree be regarded as an honourable compensation for the loss of liberty: he bestowed upon them, by his munificent patronage, the motives and the means of cultivating those elegant arts and useful sciences, which, more than all that fortune can give, or valour win beside, adorn, enrich, and dignify any people among whom they find a sanctuary and a home. The glory of Pisistratus, in the history of literature, is only second to that of Homer, for having gathered the poems of the latter into the most precious volume (the Sacred Scriptures excepted) which time has spared in the devastations of his march, and spared so long that even *he* cannot destroy it, except in that ruin in which he shall involve himself and all things under the sun.

From the era when the works of Homer were thus revived, and not they only but all the treasures of past and contemporary genius, in the library which Pisistratus first established, were thrown open to all who had leisure, ability, and disposition to avail themselves of the same — from that auspicious era, not only Athens, but all the little commonwealths of Greece, Sparta excepted, rose so rapidly in learning and refinement, that thenceforward, till the subversion of their independence by Philip of Macedon, has been justly styled the golden era of that illustrious land, whose heroes, philosophers, poets, histo-

rians, orators, and adepts in all that exalts and beautifies man in society, remain to this day, and must ever remain, the models and exemplars to the great and the glorious of every kindred and climate. Had they correspondingly excelled in virtue, how had they blessed their own and every other age in which their honour, name, and praise, should have been known!

But it is their literature, not their morals, with which we have at present to do, and it is but justice to say distinctly, after intimating that much was amiss, there were among them many not only of the wisest but of the best men, to whom no light but that of nature had been given, and whose nearest approach to the discovery of eternal truth was the consecration of an altar "to the unknown God." Within the period above alluded to, but especially after the battles of Marathon and Salamis had raised the reputation of their arms to an equality with the eminence of their arts, the greatest number of their greatest men appeared, and flourished in such thick contiguity and rapid succession, that the mere relics, the floating fragments of the wreck of literature which have been preserved, because they could not sink in the dead sea of oblivion, that engulphed and stagnated over the buried riches of a hundred argosies, — the mere relics and wreck of literature preserved to us, from that brief period, are of as much value as all that has been inherited, or recovered rather, from the ages before that died — may I say it? without *will*, — and the ages after, that had comparatively little wealth either to live upon or to *be-*

*queath*, though the country, under various forms of republican government, and as a province of Rome, continued to be the seat of arts, science, and philosophy through many succeeding centuries.

### *Athens.*

It was during that brief but illustrious period that Athens, the eye of Greece — the loveliest feature in a face and form, of which every line and limb was moulded as exquisitely as her own ideal image of beauty, — it was then that Athens, the eye of Greece, shone forth in all its lustre, and, when it closed, left such a remembrance of its light behind as continued to cheer the paths both of the Muses and the Graces through the comparative darkness of succeeding times. Athens *by day* presented the brilliant and vivacious spectacle of a thronging population in the forum, the portico, the grove, the theatres, the temples, the palaces of her heroic yet voluptuous city, — where the gayest, the proudest, the most intellectual people that ever dwelt in such close society, were eagerly pursuing glory under every form of labour, letters, arts, and arms, — or pleasure, in all its diversities of pomp, licentiousness, and superstition — superstition so elegantly disguised (and yet so profligate) as to impose on the imaginations, if not to captivate the understandings, of the wisest men. There every street, public edifice, and open space, was so crowded with the images of their popular divinities, — and their divinities were but the symbols of the worshippers themselves personified, though

with superhuman strength and symmetry, in marble, metal, ivory, or wood, — that it was almost a proverb, "You will as easily find a God as a man at Athens." From this picturesque profusion of sculpture, exposed without injury to the open air in that delightful clime, Athens *by night* would resemble a city of statues, — I had almost said a city of spirits, — when the cold moon looking down from a pure blue heaven, beheld, emerging from black shadows, innumerable forms of Parian marble white as snow, and disposed in every attitude of grace and majesty. One seems to *feel* the silence of the scene in thinking upon it; — its beauty, magic, grandeur, touch, and awe, and elevate the soul, and we almost expect that one of the more than mortal shapes should break the stillness, and address us in the language of Pericles or Demosthenes; till some patrician youth, like Alcibiades, flushed with wine, apparelled in purple, and crowned with flowers, followed by a rabble-rout of bacchanals, breaking forth from the haunts of their revelry, with shout, and song, and dance, and music, disenchant the whole, — or rather transform the enchantment into a new and more exhilarating spectacle of the midnight orgies of the finest sons of Greece in her prime.

Is there any where a *parallel* to this picture of imagination? — Somewhere in the depths of an abandoned wilderness, in the heart of Africa, according to an ancient tradition, there may be seen to this day, in perfect preservation, a magnificent city, once the capital of a surrounding empire, on which so strange a judgment came, that all its inhabitants were in a

moment turned to stone, while they and their dwellings were doomed to remain, through the lapse of ages, precisely as they stood, as they looked, as they were, at the infliction of the stroke. The stillness of death — of death in every form of life, reigns within the walls, while the multitudes of people of all ages, ranks, and occupations, who seem to the visitor (if visitor ever enters there) at the first glance, in the full action of men, women, and children, hurrying to and fro about their business or their amusements, — the longer you gaze seem more and more fixed to the eye, till the beholder himself becomes almost petrified by sympathy. Sometimes however (and it is well for him, when his trance is so broken), a herd of antelopes, fleeing from a lion in full chase after them, rush through the open gates of the city, and bound along the streets, regardless of the apparent throngs of human beings wherever they turn, but whose motionless figures, through long familiarity, are to them as indifferent as so many unshapen fragments of rock. — I *must* drop the veil here, both over the city of Minerva and the city of the Desert, which I have dared to bring into crude comparison with it: in contemplating either, imagination may have run riot in the labyrinths of reverie, mistaking phantoms for realities, and vain fancies for high thoughts. We return for a few moments to the straightforward path of historical retrospection.

*The Decline of Greek Literature.*

It has been already stated, that the period from Pisistratus to Philip of Macedon was the golden age of Grecian fame; literature and freedom flourishing together, — and they ought never to be separated. Literature, when freedom is lost, becomes the most degraded and the most dangerous tool of despotism; while freedom without literature — that is, without knowledge, presents the most ferociously savage state of human society, if society can exist without a single bond of moral or civil restraint. If the Spartans were not such an iron race, it was because learning and philosophy, which they affected to despise, exercised an indirect but benign influence over them without betraying the secret of their power.

From the division of the empire of Alexander the Great, when Greece fell under the dominion of one of his captains, though the Achaian league partially restored and maintained the republican spirit in some of the states, till the time when the whole country passed under the Roman yoke, — from the death of Alexander to the reign of the Emperor Aurelian, may be styled the silver age of Greece. Many noble and illustrious names of the second order belong to this period. Then followed a brazen time, which may be brought as low as the reign of Heraclius, emperor of the East, in the seventh century of the Christian era. Thenceforward, a long series of iron years have rolled in heavy and hopeless burthen over

Greece, under its own latest sovereigns, and from the fifteenth century under its Turkish oppressors to the present day.

But the circle of ages is surely now complete, and have we not the promise, the prospect, the commencement of an immediate return of Astrea to Greece, bringing back the golden days of justice, liberty, and literature, to that fairest, most fertile, that most wronged and forsaken region of the earth? Marathon and Thermopylæ are again named with enthusiasm by lips that speak nearly the same dialect, and breathe the same spirit as Miltiades and Leonidas, — from bosoms, in which the fire of Grecian bards and Grecian heroes has been recently rekindled. That fire, indeed, broke forth at first with an avenging violence, which, if it consumed not its enemies, repelled them from the soil: but now since security and repose may be looked for, we may hope that the tempered flame will, once more and for ever, shine out with a purity and splendour that shall rival, if it cannot eclipse, the glory of the better days of ancient Greece.

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# RETROSPECT OF LITERATURE, &c.

## N° III.

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### *Greek and Roman Polity contrasted.*

GREECE and Rome were the reverse of each other in respect to arts and arms. Greece, divided into almost as many little commonwealths as there were islands in her seas, or encircling mountains and intersecting rivers on her main-land, was prevented from extending her dominion otherwise than by colonisation along the neighbouring shores of Asia Minor, Sicily, and Calabria; while at home perpetual jealousies and feuds tended rather to preserve than to endanger or destroy the balanced independence of her numerous states. In one instance only, Greece became an invader and a conqueror; but that was not till she herself had been invaded and conquered by Philip of Macedon. Then, not of choice, but from compulsion, under his son Alexander, her collected armies, small in comparative numbers, but forming a phalanx of which every soldier was in

himself a host, were led through the heart of Asia, and even to the banks of the Ganges, reducing the whole eastern world to the personal sway of their commander; — for it was for himself, and not for his country, — for himself alone, and not for a dynasty of princes in his own line, that "Macedonia's madman" won the most unwieldy empire the world ever saw: — it rose, it stood, it fell with him.

To the political fate of Greece, after his demise, allusion sufficient has already been made. It never again was a conqueror at home or abroad. In Greece, therefore, (Sparta excepted, which from the days of Lycurgus, through many generations, maintained its standing as its legislator had left it, — in resolute semi-barbarism; uniting the savage virtues with a high tone of moral feeling on some points, and a deplorable profligacy on others:) in Greece, the culture of the fine arts was the principal occupation of the most accomplished minds, and the profession of arms was secondary, but only secondary, and almost parallel with this favourite pursuit among those who had leisure to choose their way of life. In Rome, on the contrary, for seven centuries after the foundation of the city, aggression and aggrandisement were the watch-words of her citizens, and universal empire the secret or avowed aim of her warriors and statesmen; till, having won the world with her sword, she became the victim of that reaction by which Nature avenges herself on all, whether individuals or nations, who outrage her equity in the distribution of power, wealth, dignity, or dominion. The luxuries and the vices of the

conquered countries became the snares and the destroyers of Rome herself.

But before we proceed to notice the literature of Rome in a retrospect like the present, brief as it must be even on the main subjects, it will be requisite to glance at least for a few moments upon the character and condition of the multitude, both in Greece and Italy, during the two most brilliant eras of each. The term *classic*, affixed by way of pre-eminence to the literature and arts of these people, operates like a spell upon our imagination: without attaching *to* it any definite meaning, we associate *with* it all that is great and splendid, beautiful and excellent, in the surviving pages of ancient authors; as well as all that is venerable, sublime, and almost superhuman in the relics of Greek and Roman architecture and sculpture — the severest and most enduring of manual labours.

In these, for the present at least, let the writers, the builders, and the artists stand alone and unrivalled. They were *the few*, but what were *the many*, in the renowned regions whence we have derived those treasures of learning, and in which we inherit (as common property to all who have minds to admire them) those stupendous structures of human skill and might? So far as the epithet *classic* is an accommodated word, employed by a kind of literary courtesy to designate superiority of intellect and knowledge, I am bold to affirm that Britain is as classic as Greece was in the days of Homer, and as Rome was at any period between her foundation and the close of the third Punic war. I speak of the

relative intelligence of the whole body of the people, rank for rank, in each of those countries, compared with the actual measure of information diffused through the corresponding orders in this island.

### *The Common People of Greece.*

In all the *classic* regions of antiquity, whether monarchies or republics, knowledge was a species of free-masonry; none but the initiated were the depositaries of its secrets, and these privileged persons were almost universally princes, nobles, priests, or men of high degree, including those who, from bent of genius or other auspicious circumstances, were devoted by choice, or compelled by office to the cultivation of letters and philosophy. The vulgar, the profane vulgar, the multitude, the million, were jealously and cruelly excluded from the benefits of learning, except in so far as these were necessarily and benignly reflected upon them in the kinder conduct and more affable manners of their masters and superiors; for long before Bacon uttered the famous oracle — "knowledge is power,*" the ancients were aware of that mystery, unsuspected by the ignorant, whom they ruled by that very power — the power of knowledge, both in spiritual and temporal predominance, as their subjects and their slaves.

Now and then, indeed, an Æsop, a Terence, or

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* "A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength." Prov. xxiv. 5.

an Epictetus, by the irrepressible buoyancy of native talent rose from the bottom of that stagnant gulph, under which living intelligences were laid down in darkness like beds of oysters; rose from the mud of servile degradation, to vindicate the honour of outraged humanity, and teach both kings and sages, that within the thickest shell of a slave there is the kernel of a man, which only grows not because it is not planted; or, when planted, only flourishes not because it is unworthily beaten down and trampled under foot by those who ought to have cherished, and pruned, and reared it to fertility. Oh! what a waste of mind and worth! What havoc of talent and capacity, of every degree and of every kind, is implied in that perpetuated thraldom of uninstructedness (if I may coin such a negative), wherein the bulk of mankind, through every age and nation under heaven, have been held by tyrants as brutish as themselves, who knew nothing of knowledge except that they feared it; or by the more flagrant injustice of those who possessed, but durst not or would not communicate it to the multitude! The aristocracy of learning has been the veriest despotism ever exercised upon earth, for it was bondage both to soul and body in those who were its victims. Thousands and thousands of spirits — immortal spirits — have dwelt in human bodies almost unconscious of their own existence, and utterly ignorant of their unawakened powers, which, had instruction been as general as it is at this day, and in our land, might, with Newton, have unfolded the laws of the universe, with Bacon, have detected the arcana of

nature by the talisman of experiment, or, with Locke, have taught the mind with introverted eye to look at itself, and range at home through all the invisible world of thought. Had this been the case three thousand years ago, and thenceforward uninterruptedly, the abstrusest branches of natural philosophy and metaphysics themselves might now have been nearly as intelligible, and as certain in their data and conclusions as are mathematics and mechanics, or the abstract principles of jurisprudence.

That the bulk of the Athenians themselves, even in the age of Pericles, were little skilled in reading and writing, is the almost inevitable conclusion to be drawn from the state of literature, in reference to the means of diffusing it in ancient times. Before the invention of printing, the slow production, the consequent scarcity, and the enormous value of books, when all were manuscript, placed the possession of them beyond the reach of the poor; and where libraries existed, few but the learned and the great could have access to them. The mode of publishing new works (independent of private communication) was by readings to companies for hire, or gratuitously in the open market-place, the schools and walks of philosophy, or at the Olympic and other national games, when all Greece was assembled to witness the corporeal and intellectual prowess of her most distinguished progeny.

How imperfect, as well as how precarious, such means of circulating knowledge must have been, we may judge by trying the experiment in imagination at home. Suppose that all the theological works to

which the people of this great city could refer were chained, as the Bible, Common Prayer, and Homilies used to be, in the chancels of our churches; and all the books on general literature, approachable by ordinary readers, were attached to tables and desks under this roof, and within the walls of similar institutions and public libraries; and, further, that no volume were allowed to be taken out, or even perused, except under the eye of a sentinel with a drawn sword or shouldered musket, for the protection of property so rare and precious; — how many, or rather how few, of the thousands and the tens of thousands who are now readers and book-owners in this metropolis, would avail themselves of privileges so painfully to be enjoyed! Would not the seven fold majority of the inhabitants satisfy themselves with what they could learn of religion on the Sabbath? But the poor Greek had no Sabbath, on which, resting from toil, he might repair to the temple, the grove, or the portico, for such instruction as priests and sages might deign to afford him. And would any, except those to whom literature was the daily bread of their minds, indulge an appetite for its dainties under the politic restraints of literary societies so circumstanced?

Morals and science, therefore, at Athens, were principally taught by word of mouth, and their lessons were learned through the ear; the eyes of the vulgar had little to do towards the improvement of their minds, except as an habitual taste for painting and sculpture, of which the most finished specimens were familiar to them from infancy, tended to soften ex-

ternal rudeness, but added almost nothing to the stock of knowledge beyond the ideas of fine forms. Nay, even the curious delight and critical exactness with which they listened to the strains of poets, and the arguments of orators in the forum, as well as the recital of the noblest and severest forms of tragic sentiment, and the subtilest and most poignant sallies of comic wit on the stage — were perfectly consistent with a very moderate standard of actual information among a lively, sensitive, and voluptuous people. It is certain that a fine but factitious taste may be formed under peculiar circumstances, (and theirs were very peculiar), without effort, and with little knowledge of the subjects on which it is exercised; such taste referring almost exclusively to the manner in which they are handled. Hence Demosthenes might well say that the first, the second, and the third requisite of a good speech was delivery; that necessarily including harmonious composition as well as brilliant utterance.

So situated, the Athenian artisan had scarcely a motive to learn to read, because if he acquired the ability, he could have little opportunity to use it. Writing, indeed, was a profession, and the occupation of a scribe must have been a profitable one; but of course it was chiefly exercised in the service of the wealthy, the learned, and the great; those who could afford to purchase books, and those who could not live without them. That the deficiency of instruction, by means of lessons addressed to the eye, was not compensated by those addressed to the ear, appears from an anecdote familiar to every schoolboy, but

which may be repeated here for the sake of the two-fold illustration of our argument which it affords. Aristides had incurred the enmity of his fellow-citizens on account of his pre-eminent virtues. A clown, ignorant even of his person, applied to him to mark his own name for banishment on the shell used in the ballot of ostracism. Having complied with this request, the philosopher enquired what the accused had done to deserve such a punishment. "I don't know," replied the fellow; "but it provokes me to think that he, of all men, should strive to be called *the just*." This story confirms the assumption that the common people of Greece, in her glory, were not generally taught to read and write, and that not only moral feeling, but intellectual discernment also, was much lower among them than among our contemporaries.

### *The Common People of Rome.*

The founder of Rome seems to have been as much of a savage as might be expected of one who was suckled by a wolf. It was the genius and sagacity of his successor which established by wisdom what he had begun in violence, and gave to "the eternal city" the principle of duration. Romulus had formed a body; Numa Pompilius lent the soul; — he made his own soul immortal upon earth in it; and his spirit swayed the counsels and led the enterprises of its senators and warriors in every stage of its progress to universal sovereignty. If but for Romulus Rome had never been — it may be affirmed, that but for Numa Pompilius, Rome had not continued to be,

or had not risen above the level of the petty commonwealths that surrounded and harassed it without cessation, till they were all engulphed in its vortex. This great prince, in a dark age, at the head of a horde of barbarian adventurers, by his transcendent policy and enlightened institutes, not only perpetuated the civil polity of the infant state on the basis of knowledge being power, but, by virtue of the same victorious principle, enabled the youthful republic, in the sequel, to extend her empire beyond the ditch over which Remus leaped in contempt, and was slain in it by his brother, from the Euphrates on the one hand, to the Atlantic on the other; and from Ethiopia, within the precincts of the torrid zone, to Britain, "divided from the world," towards the north.

The Romans laboured under the same disadvantages in acquiring and communicating knowledge as the Greeks; and they laboured under many more, from the rough, fierce manners of the plebeians, and the unquenchable thirst for martial glory that distinguished the patricians. Education, of consequence, was low among all classes, not excepting the highest, till after the reduction of Greece, when the polite arts of the vanquished brought the conquerors under the liberal yoke of instruction. Meanwhile, however, even in these youthful days of Rome, we meet with more examples, and those examples of a higher order, of pure virtue, self-denial, self-devotion, self-sacrifice, than pagan antiquity can furnish from all its records beside. Simple manners, generous sentiments, unaffected scorn of corruption, public spirit, and a certain peculiar intellectual courage, as well as that personal

valour which was a matter of course, being called into continual exercise by the economy of war in those times, in which, during every battle, innumerable single combats were waging at once throughout the whole field; — these were the common qualities of the earlier Romans, and their descendants, for five centuries.

The circumstance to which this cast of character may be traced is honourable to the people, and glorious to that sex, which, among the Romans, was always treated with the reverence, not less than the affection, which "man that is born of a woman" owes to her from whom he not only derives life, but to whom he is indebted even until death for life's best comforts and sweetest enjoyments. That reverence among uncivilised tribes is rarely paid by the savage of the forest or the wilderness to his help-meet; and even among the polished nations of antiquity, Greece herself not excepted, woman had not the honour due to her; her lord and master, therefore, derived not from her the benefit of that influence which she was intended to exercise over him, without appearing to exercise any influence at all. The Roman matrons and the Roman maidens are equally illustrious in the primitive annals of their country. The mothers were the instructors of the youth of both sexes; they taught them at home; every family was a school of industry and a school of virtue; frank, simple, and austere. Regarding their children as their jewels, it was their duty, their pride, and their happiness, to make them as in-

trinsically valuable and externally ornamental as might be.

### *Roman Literature.*

At length, Carthage destroyed, and Greece subdued, literature began to be cultivated with enthusiasm by this hardy and heroic people; and, once introduced, it soon began to show its benign influence on the manners of all classes, from the patrician to the domestic slave, and to produce its fruits in minds of every mould, wherein the seeds of knowledge were sown. About this era flourished Ennius and Plautus; and thenceforward Rome rose as rapidly in letters as in arms; so that, within a generation or two, Lucretius, Catullus, and Cicero had advanced the intellectual glory of their country to the verge of its consummation. But even in the Augustan age, which followed, when we consider the base means by which the Roman people were bribed into slavery, held in gorgeous fetters, and their ferocious passions glutted with cruel and bloody spectacles, to restrain them from reflecting on their degradation, and conspiring against the new tyranny;—who can doubt, that, in morals and understanding, London, at this hour, is as *classic* as pagan Rome was in the proudest moment of her splendid infamy?

The verses of the elder Romans, so far as can be collected concerning their character, were burlesque and satirical (like those of the modern Greenlanders) rather than warlike and devotional, as the earliest poetry generally is. But from the expulsion of the

Tarquins, and the establishment of a consular government, eloquence was always in special esteem, and diligently cultivated, though of a kind corresponding with the simple habits, narrow learning, and turbulent circumstances of the times. The tongue was the weapon with which civil war was carried on, and political ascendency gained, in the conflicts between the patricians and the plebeians, — at everlasting strife with each other in the forum, but in perpetual league in every other field, where the sword was the arbiter, and the spoils of the world the prize of victory. Hence the Latin language, even before it was employed for the more brilliant exercises of literature, had been highly wrought, and condensed into a most energetic vehicle for the commerce of thought; and afterwards, by the practice of its best speakers and writers, grace and vigour became equally blended in its construction and idiom. Inferior in copiousness, splendour, and flexibility, to the inimitable Greek, it is itself inimitable in pithy and sententious brevity; while in grandeur and beauty, its orators and poets have left examples of its capabilities which those of its rival tongue can scarcely excel. From Ennius to Virgil, there was a rapidly ascending succession of master-minds, formed not only to rule the taste of contemporaries, but to give laws of thinking to all posterity, by whom their labours of thought should be possessed, with the power of appreciating such models of excellence.

During the triumvirate of Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus, there were living at once in Italy the greatest number of poets, orators, historians, and

philosophers, that Rome ever knew; and many of these were of the highest rank in their respective professions. But in Rome, as in Greece, with liberty fell literature, not indeed at once, for she rose and fell frequently — rising weaker, and falling heavier each time; but from the hour when Augustus assumed the purple, he put chains upon the Muses, — golden ones indeed, and sparkling with gems, but still they *were* chains, — chains that bound the soul. Adorned and degraded with these, they were compelled to walk in his train — beautiful captives, smiling like infants, and singing like syrens, but sick at heart, pining in thought as they followed the triumphal car of the enslaver of their country; at whose wheels Roman freedom, Roman virtue, Roman glory, were dragged in the dust; and never, never again stood upright, and strong, and fearless as before.

Thenceforward literature and philosophy visibly declined; slowly at first, but with accelerating tendency towards final extinction; so that from the close of the reign of Trajan down to the fourth century of the Christian era, when the poet Claudian flourished, who, with all his faults, was worthy of a better age, — there is not a solitary monument of Roman genius to rank with the master-pieces of the fifty years which either preceded or followed the usurpation of supreme power by Augustus. There are, however, various useful and interesting productions amidst this decay of learning, which throw light upon the public events and private manners of the intervening period of intestine turbulence and

barbarian aggression, by which the pride and power of Rome were gradually shaken, dilapidated, overthrown, and finally broken to pieces on the banks of the Tyber, never to be reinstated.

### *Literature during the Middle Ages.*

For nearly ten centuries succeeding, the literature both of Greece and Rome was of a character so heterogeneous, that this epithet alone will be sufficient to designate it,—the necessary brevity of the present review not allowing us to waste another word upon it in reference to antiquity. Meanwhile, revolution after revolution changed the condition of the people that inhabited the provinces of the western empire from the death of Constantine the Great. The Goths, Vandals, Huns, with numberless and nameless tribes of barbarians, emigrating in mass,—like mountains undermined, and sliding from their base; or forests on morasses, slowly ruptured, and engulphing their own growth as well as inundating the adjacent plains,—from Scythia, Sarmatia, Siberia, and the inexhaustible regions of Tartary, overran Germany, Gaul, Italy, and Spain; out of whose partitions of the spoil of Europe gradually arose its modern empires, kingdoms, and commonwealths. From the stern and summary principles of equity among these rude people, grafted upon the Roman institutes embodied by Justinian, sprang the laws and policy of Christian nations at this day. In Britain itself we owe more of the rights and freedom we enjoy, to those hordes, which have been held up to indigna-

tion as the ravagers and destroyers of every thing great, and good, and glorious, in government and literature, during that revolutionary struggle, which compelled the Romans to withdraw their legions and their colonists from our remote island, and reduced the enfeebled natives to call in the aid of the Saxons to repel the inroads of the Picts and Scots; — we owe more to these vilified savages than to their illustrious victims, whose fate has so often excited the compassion of historians, poets, moralists, and declaimers of every class. Yet it must be acknowledged, after all, that the Romans, from their degeneracy, were worthy of no better a fate; —nay, they were so irrecoverably corrupt and emasculate, that the infusion of purer blood from the full fountains of the north, had become requisite to restore human nature itself in the south of Europe to health, vigour, and temperance,— the true standard both of mental and bodily enjoyment and perfection.

The fate of the eastern empire was longer held in suspense: it stood a thousand years on its new base, at the point where Europe and Asia meet on the opposite shores of the Hellespont; but it fell, in the sequel, after many a long and furious struggle against the encroachments of the Saracens and the Turks. Nothing in history is more extraordinary than the sudden rise, the rapid progress, and the amazing extension of the empire of the former. In less than a hundred and fifty years the Saracen arms had conquered all the western, southern, and eastern provinces of the Roman world, including Spain, Barbary, Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Asia-Minor, and the

adjacent regions; to which were added Arabia, whence they issued, with Persia, a great part of Tartary, and in process of time the whole of India within the Ganges, where the eagles of Rome had never even alighted, much less gathered themselves together upon the prey. It is true, that all these countries were never, at the same time, under the immediate sovereignty of one prince; but it is not the caliphate of Bagdad alone of which we now speak,—the reference is to the domination at large of the Saracens, whom their kindred origin, language, manners, religion, and the rage, *first* for conquest, and *afterwards* for knowledge, assimilated with each other, and distinguished from every people under heaven beside.

### *Mahomet.*

At the beginning of the seventh century, an unlettered slave and a renegade monk invented a new form of superstition,—a triple cord to bind the human spirit, composed of certain parts of Judaism, Christianity, and Paganism, so subtly and inextricably implicated, that to this day it continues to hold in captivity as great a multitude of our divided race as ever professed the same form of faith.

Among the innumerable millions of those who have lived and died in this world of change and mortality, if we were to fix on one, whose existence, opinions, and actions, in their results, have more extensively influenced the destinies of a larger proportion of their fellow-creatures than those of any other, we should name the false prophet of Mecca. There have been

warriors, legislators, and fanatics, who, in their circle, have equalled and even excelled him in prowess, policy, and extravagance; but not one can be brought into entire competition with Mahomet for the spread and permanence of his fame, either as conqueror, law-giver, or impostor. His empire, institutes, and superstition have been rooted and perpetuated over so vast a portion of the old world, that the tail of his elborach (the beast which carried him on his miraculous journey to Paradise),—the tail of his elborach, like that of the dragon in the Apocalypse, may be said to have drawn after him a third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them down to the earth. Interpreting these stars agreeable to the hieroglyphic language of prophecy, as signifying kings and their kingdoms, states and their people, this has been literally the case for twelve centuries,—a longer date than that of any single empire, ancient or modern. In this view Mahomet may be called the greatest and most extraordinary man that ever had being on earth.

The former part of this impostor's life, compared with the latter, presents one of the most striking contrasts that can be found even in the fictions of poetry. According to the generally received accounts, he was the posthumous son of his father, early left an orphan by his mother, and adopted by an uncle, who being too poor to provide for his wants, sold him into bondage at sixteen years of age. Then, however, he grew into such favour with his master, that he was entrusted by him with many valuable mercantile enterprises,—and into such favour with his mistress,

that, on the decease of her husband, she conferred on her slave her person and her wealth.

Had one of the numberless deaths that lie in ambush day and night around the path of man, and to which, from the ill-fortune of his childhood, and the misery of his circumstances till he had passed maturity, Mahomet was more imminently exposed than it is the chance (so to speak) of most people,—had one of those deaths cut him off, in some unexpected moment, it is impossible to imagine what would have been the actual religious and political condition of many of the richest provinces of Asia, Africa, and Europe, during the ages upon ages in which his successors—as true to his religion as that religion is true to the worst passions of human nature,—have followed him in his track of blood; carrying the sword and the Koran from the heart of Arabia to the extremes of east and west of the ancient continent. What *has* been the condition of those most magnificent, and, from sacred and classic associations, those most venerable countries of the globe, is well known, and need not be particularised here.

But it is humiliating to the pride of human intellect, that the most comprehensive moral change that ever was effected by a mere man in the character of an immense proportion of the species, was the work of a barbarian, unacquainted with the literature and science of his own Arabia, as scanty at that time as the herbage in its deserts; and it is yet more derogatory to the vaunted pretensions of human virtue, unaided by a really divine influence, that this *moral*

*change* was itself the greatest *moral evil* from *one* source, with which our race has been visited since the serpent beguiled Eve with his subtlety. The Koran, which contains the oracles of this anomalous heresy,—anomalous, yet so admirably adapted to all the fierce and licentious passions of our nature, that it required no miracle to aid the sword in its promulgation, finding or making a traitor in every evil heart which it assailed,—the Koran is said to be a model of elegant Arabic composition, and, though antiquated, by no means deserving the character which the celebrated John Hutchinson gives of it; namely, that it is a jargon of dialects never spoken by man. The learned Hebraist, in this instance, was probably prejudiced by his abhorrence of the doctrines which this apocryphal volume contains. On the other hand, if the diction be so pure, it could not have been the work of the arch-deceiver himself, or he was not the illiterate personage whom he affected to be, perhaps for this very purpose,—that the eloquence and knowledge displayed in this pretended revelation might appear supernatural, and self-evidence that he was verily inspired.

Be this as it may, Mahomet and his immediate successors, in all other respects, were brutal, remorseless, fanatical conquerors, ravagers, and overthrowers of nations and of letters. It was in the reign of Omar, the third of this ferocious line, that the celebrated Alexandrian Library was condemned to be burnt, on the shrewd assumption, that if the books were in consonance with the Koran, they were useless; and if contrary to it, heretical. This has been

deemed the greatest loss which learning ever sustained; and certainly, in bulk, if not in value; as *one single* calamity, and a calamity for ever irreparable, —it was the greatest that could even be imagined within the range of possibility. Two libraries, however, of nearly equal amount in number of volumes, and probably much more precious in the selection, had been previously consumed by fire in the same situation. Those, therefore, who take it for granted, that if the third had been spared by the Arabs, its contents would have been preserved as an inheritance to enrich all posterity,— may console themselves for its wanton destruction, by reflecting, that if two libraries of the kind, and on the spot, guarded by the vigilance and jealousy of the most enlightened people of the earth, were destroyed in the course of two centuries between the age of Julius Cæsar and that of the Antonines, it is scarcely probable, that *this*, for eight hundred years longer, would have escaped fire, dispersion, or ruin, by violence, neglect, or accident, while Egypt was in possession of one race of barbarian masters after another.

### *The Literature of the Saracens.*

The spoilers themselves, in this instance, ultimately made all the compensation that was in the power of man to make for this one act of unexampled havoc. The Arabs — the Saracens, as they were afterwards called — had scarcely exhausted their first military fury, in the march of uninterrupted conquest, east, west, north, and south, than they began to

appreciate the intrinsic worth of books. Learning avenged herself nobly on these her enemies, by first making them her captives, then her friends, and finally her champions, by whom she was, in the sequel, preserved from all but utter annihilation in those very lands where she had once held sovereign sway. The Saracens, with an eagerness of search strikingly contrasted with their recklessness of devastation, in this respect, collected, wherever they could be found, copies of the Greek authors of the classic ages, which, being translated into their own tongue, they made the text-books of schools and colleges, established by authority in every country wherein they had gained a settlement; and they employed their own most eminent scholars to write commentaries on the same. Their princes even entered into treaties with the eastern emperors, at Constantinople, for rare manuscripts, which had now become to them of the value of provinces.

In process of time — ay, within two centuries from the conflagration of the Alexandrian Library, — the works of Aristotle and other Grecian philosophers, poets, and historians, were retranslated from the Arabic versions into Latin, and the other languages of the west; nay, so complete was "learning's triumph o'er her barbarous foes," that through these vehicles, imperfect as they must have been, the polemical schoolmen of the middle ages derived their ill-digested learning. It is lamentable to think that so many of the latter — men of gigantic intellect, — wasted their strength for the most pigmy purposes. These wandering stars, amidst the night of ages,

shooting singly through the settled gloom that hung over the whole horizon of Europe, or occasionally revealed in constellations through rifted clouds that closed upon them in redoubled darkness; — these schoolmen, as they are still called, were proofs, that under the most repressing circumstances, there are, in every generation, minds which cannot be kept down; — minds, which, by their native energy and buoyance, will struggle into liberty of thought, and exercise the sovereignty of genius over the ignorant and passive multitude, — at least if they can find no better subjects. From the Arabs chiefly, this race of hunters after quiddities and crudities, of wranglers about straws and hairs, bubbles and atoms, learned what they knew of mathematics, metaphysics, chemistry, and natural philosophy, with such arts and sciences as were then in repute, though very defectively understood, and little improved, from century to century.

Charlemagne the Great, and our own Alfred, a greater than he, commanded the original writings of Arabic authors, as well as their versions from the Greek, to be translated into the vernacular tongues of their respective people; and thus each of these truly great princes laid the foundation of the future literary fame of his own country.

To the Arabs, also, Europe is indebted for the numeral figures and the invaluable cypher, without which neither the mathematics, nor the sublime and interesting sciences which depend upon these for their proofs and illustrations, could, by any other conceivable means, have been carried to their present

perfection. If he who invented the alphabet (the letters of which are the numerals of writing) was the greatest intellectual benefactor of his species, he who invented the signs of the numeration table (which are the alphabet of the mathematics) was only second to him in the boon which he bequeathed to posterity. Every moment of every hour of every day, in every country where letters and figures are known, there are thousands of individuals exercising the privileges and enjoying the benefit of these two inestimable inheritances. The discovery of the golden key of numbers, with its ten wards, which has unlocked to us the starry heavens, as well as the infinitesimal series of things on earth, has been ascribed to the Indians; but so far as can be shown, at least, those from whom we received it, are entitled, in equity as well as gratitude, to that credit from us.

But the Saracens not only excelled their contemporaries in arts and sciences, useful and abstruse; from them, more than from all the classic models of antiquity, modern Europe derived the character, materials, and embellishments of its poetry. The new-discovered world of romance, likewise, for the most part belongs to Arabia and the east, having been as little known in the ages of Pericles and Augustus as were the unvisited regions beyond the Ganges. The songs of troubadours, the tales of novelists, the legends of chivalry, were all, more or less, borrowed or imitated from Saracen originals. The marvellous and terrific imagery of these works of melancholy or mirthful imagination were equally of oriental or African lineage; and those features,

wherein they claim affinity with classic prototypes, were not impressed upon them from the originals in Greek or Roman song, but were transmitted, and transformed by transmission, to them through the enchanted medium of Arabian genius, seizing whatever it found of beauty or grandeur in the productions of taste, and making all it seized as much its own in appearance as though it were indigenous to the soil, whither in reality it had been recently transplanted.

### *The Revival of Literature in Europe.*

Giants, dragons, necromancers, griffins, and a thousand other antic forms of men and animals, that people poetry and romance, were all either natives or foundlings of the east: so were the more delicate progeny of fairies, gnomes, sylphs, salamanders — spirits of the elements entirely distinct from the mythological beings which classic fable had created there. Of fairies, especially, the delight of childhood, and, in their place, not less the delight of age, renewing in luxurious reverie the feelings of childhood: — of fairies it may be said that nothing was ever invented by the wit of man so finely fanciful — so real, and yet so aërial; that to this hour, when their existence is no longer even a vulgar error, they continue to be so exquisitely marvellous, and withal so natural, that they are the very population of the world of poetry. Without these brilliant and awful creations of enthusiastic sensibility — I now allude to the gigantic and terrible, as well as to the minute

and beautiful, — in every form of fear, and love, and hope personified, in warmer, richer, fairer lands, where mechanical labour is little known, and where, from the earliest times, traditional lore of wonders has been the literature of tribes, fierce, fiery, and roving, like the Arabs, or a people indolent and voluptuous, like the Persians; — without these brilliant and awful creations of oriental minds, the poetry of modern Europe might never have arisen above mediocrity — the freezing point of imitation, where all may be as splendid, yet as cold and unsubstantial, as figured frost-work, or drifted snow, or transparent ice. Modern poetry, we may presume, scarcely could have risen above this inanimate mediocrity, because it would have wanted machinery — a race of supernatural beings of ethereal origin, to supply the vacant thrones of Olympus.

The mythology of Greece and Rome, in their native songs, fills the mind and transports the imagination, but rarely touches the affections: the divinities of these highly intellectual people were as little calculated to excite human sympathies (though invested with human passions, and boundless impunity in the indulgence of them) as their own images in marble and brass in their temples, and by the public ways. That kind of epic machinery belonged exclusively to the periods, during which it was the religion of the multitude, and while it remained the secret whereby the great and the learned held that multitude at once in ignorance and subjection. Hence the deities of Homer and Virgil have never been introduced with happy effect into modern verse of high order. There

is not a popular heroic poem in any living language, in which they have been well employed; nay, there is not one in which they have been employed at all, where they are not an absolute encumbrance — not to say nuisance. The truth is, that they destroy poetical probability the moment they appear on the scene; disenchanting the glorious unreality, which the man of true genius makes a million-fold more real to the feelings and fancy of his readers than the most accurate and elaborate representation of facts in history can be. There are, indeed, some lyrical pieces, especially Italian canzoni, and, in our own language, some playful love songs, and other trifles, in which the divinities of ancient times are quite at home.

But from "the highest heaven of invention" Jove and his senate are for ever and for ever fallen; so that it would be as rational, and about as easy, to rebuild their temples, and restore their worship, as to reinstate them in the honours and immortality which they once enjoyed on Parnassus, and which, as their only immortality, they will possess so long as the literary relics of Greece and Rome are studied and admired. On the other hand, the oriental mythology, if I may so style it, as soon as the revival of letters in the south of Europe revived the most elegant of all the forms which letters can assume, — Poetry, which is the language of the noblest minds, and itself most noble when most intelligible; — the oriental mythology at once supplied a machinery, gloomy, splendid, gay, and terrible, for every occasion, as the one or the other might be wanted. The poems of modern

date, (those I mean which have outlived their century,) most celebrated, and which will be longest remembered, owe half their inspiration, and more than half their popularity, to its influence. For examples we need but recollect the "Orlando Furioso" of Ariosto, the "Gerusalemme Liberata" of Tasso, the "Faerie Queene" of Spenser, and, to crown all, the "Tempest" and "Midsummer Night's Dream" of Shakspeare. But these belong to a later period.

Of the literature of the middle ages it may generally be said, that it was "voluminous and vast." Princes, nobles, and even priests then were often ignorant of the alphabet. The number of authors was proportionally small, and the subjects on which they wrote were of the driest nature in polemics—such were the subtleties of the schoolmen; of the most extravagant character in the paths of imagination—such were the romances of chivalry, the legends and songs of troubadours; and of the most preposterous tendency in philosophy, so called,—such were the treatises on magic, alchymy, judicial astrology, and the metaphysics. To say all that could be said on any theme, whether in verse or prose, was the fashion of the times; and, as few read but those who were devoted to reading by an irresistible passion or professional necessity, and few wrote but those who were equally impelled by an inveterate instinct,—great books were the natural produce of the latter, who knew not how to make little ones; and great books were requisite to appease the voracity of the former, who, for the most part, were rather gluttons than epicures in their taste for literature. Great books, therefore, were both the

fruits and the proofs of the ignorance of the age: they were usually composed in the gloom and torpor of the cloister, and it almost required a human life to read the works of an author of the first magnitude, because it was nearly as easy to compound as to digest such crudities. The common people, under such circumstances, could feel no interest and derive no advantage from the labours of the learned, which were equally beyond their purchase and their comprehension. Those *libri elephantini* (like the registers of the Roman citizens, when the latter amounted to millions) contained little more than catalogues of things, and thoughts, and names, in words without measure, and often without meaning worth searching out; so that the lucubrations, through a thousand years, of many a noble, many a lovely mind, which only wanted better direction how to unfold its energies, or display its graces, to benefit or delight mankind, were but passing meteors, that made visible the darkness out of which they rose, and into which they sunk again, to be hid for ever.

It is remarkable, that while the classic regions of Europe, as well as the northern and western colonies of the dissolved Roman empire, were buried in barbarian ignorance, learning found a temporary refuge in some of the least distinguished parts of the then known world — in Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Scotland, and even in Ireland.

And here these papers must conclude, having brought our cursory retrospect to the thirteenth century, an era at which the minds of the people of Europe were already prepared (though scarcely con-

scious of the turn in their favour) for those great and glorious discoveries in literature and philosophy, which—since the adoption of the mariner's compass and the invention of printing, introducing liberty of thought, and, as a necessary consequence of the latter, freedom of speech,—have made way for the diffusion of knowledge, revealing new arts and sciences, and calling up old ones from the dead in more perfect forms.

# A VIEW

OF

# MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

# A VIEW

OF

# MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

## N° I.

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*English Literature under the Tudors and the first Stuarts.*

THE discovery of the mariner's compass, the invention of printing, the revival of classic learning, the Reformation, with all the great moral, commercial, political, and intellectual consequences of these new means, materials, and motives for action and thought, produced corresponding effects upon literature and science. With the progress of the former alone, in our own country, have we to do at present.

From the reign of Elizabeth to the protectorate of Cromwell, inclusively, there rose in phalanx, and continued in succession, minds of all orders, and hands for all work, in poetry, philosophy, history, and theology, which have bequeathed to posterity such treasures of what may be called genuine English Literature, that whatever may be the transmigrations

of taste, the revolutions of style, and the fashions in popular reading, these will ever be the sterling standards. The translation of the Scriptures, settled by authority, and which, for reasons that need not be discussed here, can never be materially changed, consequently can never become obsolete, — has secured perpetuity to the youth of the English tongue; and whatever may befall the works of writers in it from other causes, they are not likely to be antiquated in the degree that has been foretold by one, whose own imperishable strains would for centuries have delayed the fulfilment of his disheartening prophecy, even if it were to be fulfilled: —

> "Our sons their fathers' failing language see,
> And such as Chaucer *is* shall Dryden *be*.
>
> POPE.

Now it is clear, that unless the language be improved or deteriorated, far beyond any thing that can be anticipated from the slight variations which have taken place within the last two hundred years, compared with the two hundred years preceding, Dryden *cannot become* what Chaucer *is*; especially since there seems to be a necessity laid upon all generations of Englishmen to understand, as the fathers of their mother-tongue, the great authors of the age of Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I.; from Spenser (though much of his poetry is wilfully obscured by affected phraseology) and Shakspeare, (the idolatry to whose name will surely never permit its divinity to die) to Milton, whose style cannot fall into decay, while there is talent or sensibility among his

countrymen to appreciate his writings. It may be confidently inferred, that the English language will remain subject to as little mutation as the Italian has been, since works of enduring excellence were first produced in it; — the prose of Boccaccio and the verse of Dante, so far as dialect is concerned, are as well understood by the common people of their country, at this day, as the writings of Chaucer and Gower are by the learned in ours.

Had *no* works of transcendent originality been produced within the last hundred and fifty years, it may be imagined that such fluctuations might have occurred, as would have rendered our language as different from what it *was* when Milton flourished, as *it then* was from what it *had been* in the days of Chaucer; with this reverse, that, during the latter, it must have degenerated as much as it had been refined during the earlier interval. But the standard of our tongue having been fixed at an era when it was rich in native idioms, full of pristine vigour, and pliable almost as sound articulate can be to sense, — and that standard having been fixed in poetry, the most permanent and perfect of all forms of literature, — as well as in the version of the Scriptures, which are necessarily the most popular species of reading, —no very considerable changes can be effected, except Britain were again exposed to invasion as it was wont to be of old; and the modern Saxons or Norwegians were thus to subvert both our government and our language, and either utterly extinguish the latter, or assimilate it with their own.

Contemporary with Milton, though his junior, and belonging to a subsequent era of literature, of which he became the great luminary and master-spirit, was Dryden. His prose (not less admirable than his verse) in its structure and cadence, in compass of expression, and general freedom from cumbersome pomp, pedantic restraint, and vicious quaintness, which more or less characterised his predecessors, became the favourite model in that species of composition, which was happily followed and highly improved by Addison, Johnson, and other periodical writers of the last century. These, to whom must be added the triumvirate of British historians, Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon, who exemplified, in their very dissimilar styles, the triple contrast and harmony of simplicity, elegance, and splendour, — these illustrious names in prose are so many pledges, that the language in which they immortalised their thoughts is itself immortalised by being made the vehicle of these, and can never become barbarian, like Chaucer's uncouth, rugged, incongruous medley of sounds, which are as remote from the strength, volubility, and precision of those employed by his polished successors, as the imperfect lispings of infancy, before it has learned to pronounce half the alphabet, and imitates the letters which it cannot pronounce with those which it can, are to the clear, and round, and eloquent intonations of youth, when the voice and the ear are perfectly formed and attuned to each other.

*English Literature from the Restoration to the reign of George the Third.*

From the Restoration in 1660 to the time when Cowper had risen into full fame in 1790, may be dated the second grand era of Modern English Literature, reckoning from Elizabeth to the close of Cromwell's protectorate, already mentioned as the first. The early part of this period (the reigns of Charles II. and James II.) was distinguished for works of wit and profligacy; the drama in particular was pre-eminent for the genius that adorned, and the abominations that disgraced its scenes. The middle portions of the same period, from the Revolution of 1688 to the close of the reign of George II., was rather the age of reason than of passion, of fine fancy than adventurous imagination in the *belles lettres* generally. Pope, as the follower of Dryden in verse, excelled him as much in grace and harmony of numbers, as he might be deemed to fall below him in raciness and pithy originality.

In like manner he imitated Horace in Latin, and Boileau in French, rivalling, perhaps equalling either in his peculiar line, and excelling both, by combining the excellencies of each in his own unique, compact, consummate style. It is to be remarked, however, that though Pope gave the tone, character, and fashion to the verse of his day, as decidedly as Addison had given to the prose, yet of all his imitators not one has maintained the rank of even a second-rate author; the greatest names among his contemporaries, Thom-

son and Young, being those who differed most from him in manner, subject, and taste, — especially in those of their works which promise to last as long as his own.

Between Pope and Cowper we have the names of Collins, Gray, Goldsmith, and Churchill. Of these, the two former have nothing in common with Pope, but they produced too little, and were too great mannerists themselves to be the fathers, in either line, of a school of mannerists: it is only when mannerism is connected with genius of the proudest order or the most prolific species, that it becomes extensively infectious among minor minds. As for Goldsmith and Churchill, whatever they appear to have owed to Pope, they are remembered and admired for what they possessed independent of him, each having wealth enough of his own to be a freeholder of Parnassus, after paying off any mortgage on his little estate due to that enormous capitalist.

The greater stress has been laid upon the utter mortality among all the numberless imitators of Pope, because it exemplifies the impossibility of *any* imitator ever being a *great* poet, however great his model, and however exquisite his copying may be. Nothing in the English language can be more perfect than the terseness, elegance, and condensation of Pope's sentiments, diction, and rhyme. Of course the successful imitation of these might be expected to prove an infallible passport to renown, because such a style involves the happiest union of diverse requisites, and its charm consists far less in any one peculiarity (as is the case of other eminent bards), than in the per-

fection of those principles which are common to all poetic composition; yet in our own day, there has been an example of this successful imitation, which in every other respect has been a total failure. The *Paradise of Coquettes*, published a few years ago, was a work of much taste and genuine talent in its mechanical construction, as well as in the playful, delicate, pungent satire with which it abounded; yet this piece, worthy of the highest admiration in its way, though elaborately criticised and profusely commended in the reviews, never shone beyond their precincts, and was scarcely read except in quotations, or in their pages. This miscarriage afforded also an encouraging proof to ill-treated authors, or authors who imagine themselves ill-treated, — that permanent fame depends not upon contemporary criticism; for whatever reviews may effect in advancing or retarding the hopes of a candidate under their examination, final success depends upon a tribunal, whose decision they cannot always, with their keenest sagacity, anticipate.

### *English Literature of the present age.*

With the exceptions already named, there was not a poet between Pope and Cowper, who had power to command in any enviable degree, or even for a little while, that popular breath of applause, which the aspirant after immortality inhales as the prelude of it. Verse, indeed, was so low in public estimation, and so little read, that few of the fugitive pieces of the hour, on their passage to oblivion, attracted sufficient notice to

defray the expenses of their journey thither. Cowper's first volume, partly from the grave character of the longer pieces, and the purposely rugged, rambling, slip-shod versification, was long neglected, till *The Task*, the noblest effort of his muse, composed under the inspiration of cheerfulness, hope, and love, unbosoming the whole soul of his affections, intelligence, and piety, — at once made our countrymen feel, that neither the genius of poesy had fled from our isle, nor had the heart for it died in the breasts of its inhabitants. The Task was the first long poem from the close of Churchill's brilliant but evanescent career, that awoke wonder, sympathy, and delight, by its own ineffable excellence, among the reading people of England.

> "The happy miracle of that rare birth,"
> (HABINGTON'S *Halcyon*).

could not fail to quicken many a drooping mind, which, without such a present evidence both of genuine song and the genuine effects of song, amidst the previous apathy to this species of literature, would hardly have ventured to brood over its own conceptions, in solitude and obscurity, till they too were warmed into life, uttered voices, put forth wings, and took their flight up to the "highest heaven of invention."

From Cowper may be deduced the commencement of the third great era of modern English Literature, since it was in no small measure to the inspiration of his Task, that our countrymen are indebted, if not

for the existence, yet certainly for the character of the new school of poetry, established first at Bristol, and afterwards transferred to the Lakes, as scenery more congenial and undisturbed for the exercise of contemplative genius. Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth started almost contemporaneously in the same path to fame, — a new one, indeed, untrodden and entangled with thorns, or obstructed with stones, yet in many parts fertile and wildly diversified; blooming with all the beauty, and breathing with all the fragrance of the richest and most cultivated enclosures of the Muses. The minds and the feelings, the passions and prejudices of men of all ranks and attainments, from the highest to the lowest, were at that time roused and interested by the fair and promising, the terrific and stupendous events of the French Revolution; and the excitement of this portentous phenomenon in the state of Europe prepared this nation especially (from the freedom with which all questions might be discussed) for that peculiar cast of subjects and of style, both in verse and prose, for which the present period is distinguished from every former one.

The first era of our modern literature, already defined as extending from Elizabeth to the close of the Protectorate, was that of nature and romance combined: it might be compared to an illimitable region of mountains, rocks, forests, and rivers, — the fairy land of heroic adventure, in which giants, enchanters, and genii, as well as knights-errant, and wandering damsels guarded by lions, or assailed by fiery flying dragons, were the native and hetero-

geneous population; where every building was a castle or a palace, an Arcadian cottage or a hermitage in the wilderness.

The second era, from Dryden to Cowper, bore a nearer resemblance to a nobleman's domain, surrounding his family mansion, where all was taste and elegance and splendour within; painting, sculpture, and literature forming its proudest embellishments: — while without, the eye ranged with voluptuous freedom over the paradise of the park, — woods, waters, lawns, temples, statues, obelisks, and points of perspective so cunningly contrived, as to startle the beholder with unexpected delight; nature and art having changed characters; and each, in masquerade of the other, playing at hide and seek amidst the self-involving labyrinths of landscape gardening.

At length, when both the eye and the heart had been wearied for more than a century with the golden mediocrity of these, in which nothing was so awful as deeply to agitate, nor so familiar as tenderly to interest, — the Bristol youths already named boldly broke through the restraint, and hazarded a new style, in which simplicity, homeliness, common names, every-day objects, and ordinary events, were made the themes and the ornaments of poetry. These naturally assimilate themselves with what is emphatically called "the country," — "each rural sight, each rural sound;" the loves and graces of domestic life, the comforts of our own fire-side; the flowery array of meadows, the green gaiety of hedge-rows, the sparkling vivacity of rivulets; kind intercourse

with neighbours, the generous ardour of patriotism, and the gentler emotions of benevolence. Such furnished the "perpetual feast of nectared sweets" set before their readers by those innovators on the courtly formality of the old school; but the charm of their song was too often interrupted by the coarseness of vulgar manners and the squalidness of poverty, — too nearly associated with physical disgusts, to be the unpolluted source of ideal delights.

This, therefore, could not last long; the subjects which might be rendered interesting were soon exhausted. Hence this ramble after Nature in her humblest forms and her obscurest haunts was only a holiday frolic; and these wayward sons of genius, by their high endowments, were destined to give a more heroic tone, a more magnificent character to the literature of their country. Southey, by his marvellous excursions in the regions both of history and romance, — Coleridge, by his wild fictions of a class entirely his own, in which there is an indescribable witchery of phrase and conceit, that affects the imagination as if one had eaten of "the insane root that takes the reason prisoner;" — and Wordsworth, by his mysticism, his Platonic love of the supreme good and the supreme beauty, which he seeks every where, and finds wherever he seeks, in the dancing of daffodils, the splendour of the setting sun, the note of a cuckoo flitting like a spirit from hill to hill, which neither the eye nor ear can follow, and in the everlasting silence of the universe to the man born deaf and dumb; — these were the three pioneers, if not the absolute founders, of the existing style of

English literature, — which has become so diversified, artificial, and exquisite, so gorgeously embellished, and adapted to every taste, as well as so abundant in its resources by importations from the wealth of every other land, that it may challenge similitude to the great metropolis of our empire, where the brain of a stranger, like myself, is bewildered amidst the infinite forms of human beings, human dwellings, human pursuits, human enjoyments, and human sufferings; perpetual motion, perpetual excitement, perpetual novelty; city manners, city edifices, city luxuries; — all these being not less strikingly characteristic of the literature of this age, than the fairy-land of adventure, and the landscape gardening of "capability Brown," were characteristic of the two periods from Spenser to Milton, and from Dryden to Cowper.

If the literature of the middle ages (as was shown in a former paper*), were principally composed of crude, enormous, indigestible masses, fitted only to monkish appetites, that could gorge iron like ostriches, when iron was cast into the shape of thought, or thought assumed the nature of iron, — the literature of the present day is entirely the reverse, and so are all the circumstances connected with it. Then there were few readers, and fewer writers; now there are many of both; and among those that really deserve the name of the former, it would be difficult to ascertain the relative proportion of the latter, for most of

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* See the Third Part of "A Retrospect of Literature," &c.

them in one way or another might be classed with writers. The vehicles, opportunities, and temptations of publishing are so frequent, so easy and unexpensive, that a man can scarcely be connected with intelligent society, without being seduced, in some frail moment, to try how his thoughts will look in print: — then, for a second or two at least, he feels as the greatest genius in the world feels on the same occasion, — "*laudum immensa cupido*," a longing after immortality, that mounts into a hope — a hope that becomes a conviction of the power of realising itself, in all the glory of ideal reality; than which no actual reality ever afterward is half so enchantingly enjoyed.

Hence the literature of our time is commensurate with the universality of education; nor is it less various than universal to meet capacities of all sizes, minds of all acquirements, and tastes of every degree. Books are multiplied on every subject on which any thing or nothing can be said, from the most abstruse and recondite to the most simple and puerile: and while the passion of book-jobbers is to make the former as familiar as the latter by royal ways to all the sciences, there is an equally perverse rage among genuine authors to make the latter as august and imposing as the former, by disguising common place topics with the colouring of imagination, and adorning the most insignificant themes with all the pomp of verse. This degradation of the high, and exaltation of the low, — this dislocation, in fact, of every thing, is one of the most striking proofs of the extraordinary diffusion of knowledge, — and of its cor-

ruption too, — if not a symptom of its declension by being so heterogeneously blended, till all shall be neutralised. Indeed, when millions of intellects, of as many different dimensions and as many different degrees of culture, are perpetually at work, and it is almost as easy to speak as to think, and to write as to speak, there must be a proportionate quantity of thought put into circulation.

Meanwhile, public taste, pampered with delicacies even to loathing, and stimulated to stupidity with excessive excitement, is at once ravenous and mawkish, — gratified with nothing but novelty, nor with novelty itself for more than an hour. To meet this diseased appetite, in prose not less than in verse, a factitious kind of the marvellous has been invented, consisting not in the exhibition of supernatural incidents or heroes, but in such distortion, high colouring, and exaggeration of natural incidents and ordinary personages, by the artifices of style, and the audacity of sentiment employed upon them, as shall produce that sensation of wonder in which half-instructed minds delight. This preposterous effort at display may be traced through every walk of polite literature, and in every channel of publication; nay, it would hardly be venturing too far to say that every popular author is occasionally a juggler, rope-dancer, or posture-maker, in this way, to propitiate those of his readers, who will be pleased with nothing less than feats of legerdemain in the exercises of the pen.

# A VIEW

OF

# MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE.

## N° II.

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### *Contemporary Poets.*

It must be conceded, that there never was a time when so great a number of men of extraordinary genius flourished together in this island; — as many may have existed, and perhaps there may be always an equal quantity of latent capacity; — but since the circumstances of no previous period of human history have been altogether so calculated to awaken, inspirit, and perfect every species of intellectual energy, it is no arrogant assumption in favour of the living, no disparagement of the merits of the dead, to assert the manifest superiority of the former in developed powers — powers of the rarest and most elevated kind in poetry, — the noblest of the arts, and that which is brought earliest to the consummation of excellence, as it depends not upon the progress of science, but on sensibility to that which is at all times

in itself equally striking in the grandeur, beauty, and splendour of external nature, with corresponding intensity of feeling towards whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report in the mind of man, or in the scenes and circumstances of domestic life.

In poetry, late as it is in the age of the world, and after all the anticipations in every field that could furnish subjects for verse within the last three thousand years, — the present generation can boast of at least six names that may be ranked with any other six (averaging the measure of genius on both sides) not only of our own country, but of any other that were contemporaries, independent of a far greater number of highly accomplished writers, such as in every refined and lettered period must abound — men who are rather poets by choice than by destiny, and who, if they had been either kings or beggars, would not have been poets at all, because in the one case they would have been above, and in the other below, the temptation and pleasure of courting the Muses. Southey, Campbell, Wordsworth, Scott, Moore, and Byron, — these, under any circumstances, from the original bias of their minds, must have been poets: had they been born to thrones, they would have woven for themselves chaplets of bays more glorious than the crowns which they inherited; had they been cast in the meanest stations of civilised society, they would have been distinguished among their peers, and above them, by some emanation of that "light from Heaven" which no darkness of ignorance in untutored minds could utterly extinguish or always hide.

It must be further acknowledged by all who have justly appreciated the works of these authors, (which are exceedingly dissimilar in those respects wherein each is most excellent,) that the great national events of their day have had no small influence in training their genius, leading them to the choice of subjects, and modifying their style. So far, then, these circumstances have been sources of inspiration; but there is a drawback with regard to each, that, yielding to the impatient temper of the times in their eager pursuit of fame, they have occasionally aimed at the temple on the mountain top, not by the slow, painful, and laborious paths which their immortal predecessors trod, and which all must tread who would be sure of gaining the eminence, and keeping their station when they have gained it, — but they have rather striven to scale the heights by leaping from rock to rock up the most precipitous side, forcing their passage through the impenetrable forests that engirdle it, or plunging across the headlong torrents that descend in various windings from their fountains at the peak. Thus they have endeavoured to attract attention and excite astonishment, rather by prodigious acts of spontaneous exertion, than to display gradually, and eventually to the utmost advantage, the well directed and perfectly concentrated force of their talents. In a word, it may be doubted whether one of the living five (for Byron is now beyond the reach of warning) has ever yet done his very best in a single effort worthy of himself (I mean in their longer works), by sacrificing all his merely good, middling, and inferior thoughts, which he has in common with every body

else, and appearing solely in his peculiar character,— that character of excellence, whatever it may be, wherein he is distinct from all the living and all the dead; — the personal identity of his genius shining only where he can outshine all rivals, or where he can shine alone when rivalry is excluded. Till each of the survivors has done this, it can hardly be affirmed that he has secured the immortality of one of his great intellectual offspring: — there is a vulnerable part of each, which Death with his dart, or Time with his scythe, may sooner or later strike down to oblivion.*

The unprecedented sale of the poetical works of Scott and Byron, with the moderate success of others, proves that a great change had taken place both in the character of authors and in the taste of readers, within forty years. About the beginning of the French Revolution scarcely any thing in rhyme, except the ludicrous eccentricities of Peter Pindar, would take with the public: a few years afterwards, booksellers ventured to speculate in quarto volumes

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* In reading the foregoing passage at the Royal and London Institutions, the Author distinctly remarked, that as he could not be supposed to speak invidiously of any one of the great poets implicated in the qualified censure, he did not think any other apology necessary either to themselves or their admirers there present, except that, deeming such censure applicable to contemporaries in general, he had named those only who could not be injured in their established reputation, or their honourable feelings, by the frankness of friendly criticism; and who could therefore afford to be told of faults which they had, in a small degree, in common with a multitude of their inferiors, who have the same in a much higher.

of verse, at from five shillings to a guinea a line, and in various instances were abundantly recompensed for their liberality. There are fifty living poets (among whom it must not be forgotten, that not a few are of the better sex — I may single out four; Mrs. Joanna Baillie, Mrs. Hemans, Miss Mitford, and L. E. L.) whose labours have proved profitable to themselves in a pecuniary way, and fame in proportion has followed the more substantial reward. This may appear a degrading standard by which to measure the genius of writers and the intelligence of readers, but, in a commercial country at least, it is an equitable one; for no man in his right mind can suppose that such a rise in the market demand could have taken place, unless the commodity itself had become more precious or more rare, or the taste of the public for that kind of literature had been exceedingly improved. Now poetry, instead of being more rare, was tenfold more abundant when it was most in request; it follows, therefore, that the demand was occasioned by a change equally creditable to the superior talents of those who furnished, and the superior information of those who consumed, the supply.

The market, however, has much fallen within these last ten years, and the richest dealer long ago invested his capital in other funds, much to his own emolument and the satisfaction of more customers than any author living besides himself can boast. Lord Byron did worse; but I am not the judge of his morality here. I shall only remark upon him in his literary character, that had he always selected materials for

his verse (Milton uniformly did his best) equal to the power which he could exercise upon them, his themes would never have been inferior to the loftiest and finest which he adorned in that golden era of his genius between the publication of the first and the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, which era, I believe, comprehends all his master-pieces; nor would his execution ever have fallen below that which, by a few touches, could strike out images of thought equal to Pygmalion's statue in beauty; while, with a breath, he could give them an earthly immortality, and by a destiny which no revolution in language or empire can reverse, send them forth to people the minds of millions of admiring readers in all ages to come. He might have done this, almost infallibly, in every instance in which he condescended to put forth the whole strength of his intellect, and lavish upon the creation of an exuberant fancy all the riches of a poetical diction, unrivalled among contemporaries, and unexcelled by any of his predecessors. Yet no modern author who can lay claim to the highest honours of Parnassus, has written a greater quantity of perishable, perishing rhyme, than the noblest of them all.

In this sketch it is not necessary to expatiate on the particular merits of any other class of poets, these two masters of the lyre having been more followed than the rest, not only by the servile herd of imitators, but by many men of real talent, who had strength and stock enough of their own to have come out in their original characters, and spoken in their own language. The consequence has been just as

it ought to be: there is not one copyist of either Sir Walter Scott or Lord Byron, who is popular at this hour; and it may be safely foretold, that not one production resembling theirs, which is not theirs, will last thirty years. There is a small but peculiar class of versifiers, which deserves a word of notice here, if it be but a word of reprobation. The leaders of this select band of poetasters are men of some fancy, a little learning, less taste, and almost no feeling. They have invented a manner of writing and thinking frigidly artificial, while affecting to be negligently natural, though no more resembling nature, than the flowers represented in shell-work on lacquered grounds, and framed in glass cases by our grandmothers, resembled the roses and carnations which they caricatured. They think, if they think at all, like people of the nineteenth century, (for certainly nobody ever thought like them before), but they write in the verbiage of the sixteenth, and then imagine that they rival the poets of Elizabeth's reign, because they mimic all that is obsolete in them, which in fact is only preserved in Spenser and Shakspeare themselves, because it is inseparably united with what can never become obsolete,—"thoughts that breathe and words that burn," not less intelligible at this day than when they were first uttered. It might be shown that the finest passages in our ancient writers are those in which the phraseology has never become antiquated, nor ever can be so till the English shall be a dead language. This school must pass away with the present generation, as surely as did the Della Cruscan of the last century.

## *The Drama.*

Is it not remarkable, while we are rich beyond precedent in every other species of elegant literature, that in the Drama we should be poor even to pauperism, if that term in its technical and degrading sense may be so applied? Not a tragedy that can live on the stage, its own element, beyond the date of a nine days' wonder, has been produced for many years. The phantasmagoria of the *Castle Spectre*, the magnificent but anomalous *Pizarro*, the crazy *Bertram*, are not exceptions, unless they can be shown to be legitimate tragedies, which, by the power of mind over mind alone, obtained not a temporary, but a permanent triumph,—a triumph that must be renewed as often as they are performed. *The Stranger*, immoral and insidious as it is, long maintained its ground by the aid of consummate acting in its most exceptionable character; but it must be acknowledged by its warmest admirers, that the catastrophe is achieved by a *coup de main*, a trick of pantomime at last, which amounts to a silent confession of failure, that after all the cunning and elaborate preparation to secure success to the interview, the Hero and Heroine, like Harlequin and Columbine, could only be reconciled in dumb show! The Gordian knot of the delicate dilemma is cut, not disentangled; and the imagination of the most enraptured spectator dare not dwell for five minutes behind the curtain after it has fallen upon the scene. The first word uttered by either party there would dissolve

the enchantment at once: Mrs. Haller must be Mrs. Haller still, and the Stranger a Stranger for ever. Yet when I name Mrs. Joanna Baillie, Miss Mitford, Lord Byron, Milman, Sotheby, Sheridan Knowles, and leave my audience to recollect other able writers of tragedy, among our contemporaries there is evidently no lack of great talent for this species of composition, that may delight in the closet, however the taste of play-goers may have degenerated so as to disrelish any thing either highly intellectual or highly poetic on the stage.

It is vain to say that many pieces bearing the name of tragedies have been brought out, which deserved a better fate than they experienced; for whatever may have been the cause of their miscarriage, the fact, the fatal fact remains, that this age has scarcely produced a tragedy which can keep its hold as a tragedy in representation; and short of this, whatever be the merits of some of the prematurely slain, they were only dialogues in blank verse. Desert is nothing in such a case, except it can enforce its claim; unless an audience cannot help being pleased, it is idle to argue upon the duty of their being so. The homage exacted by genius is that which cannot be withheld, although it is voluntarily paid. It would seem as if the age of tragedy, as well as that of epic poetry, were gone for ever; both belong to a period of less refinement in the progress of modern society than the present. This is not the place to attempt a solution of the paradox.

But comedy, — gay, polite, high-spirited comedy, might have been expected to be carried to perfection

amidst the vicissitudes of the last thirty years, when the energies of men in every rank of life being stimulated beyond example by the great events continually occurring at home and abroad, boundless diversity of character and pursuits must have been ever at hand to furnish materials for scenic exposure; while the popular mind, incessantly craving for keener excitement, would eagerly have seized upon any novelty in the form of dramatic entertainment. Every novelty, except such as genius alone could bring forth, has been presented on the stage, and accepted with avidity by the frequenters of the theatre; but no offspring of intellect and taste, at all comparable to the numberless progeny of the same in every other department of literature, has appeared to redeem the credit of the drama from the disrepute into which it has fallen, since Sheridan gave to the world his few, but inimitable comedies. These, after surpassing all that went before, seem to have left no hope for any that might follow them. This critique on the present state of the drama in England, refers to it solely as one class of literature, and bears no reference to the questionable morality of theatrical performances.

### *Novels and Romances.*

In what are properly called novels, fictitious narratives of common life, the period between Pope and Cowper was more prolific than any preceding one. Indeed, the genuine novel was yet a novelty, which originated, or rather was introduced, in the merry

reign of Charles II., but never had been carried to its height of humour and reality till Fielding, Smollett, and Richardson, each in his peculiar and unrivalled way, displayed its utmost capabilities of painting men and manners as they are.

These were followed by "numbers without number," and without name, that peopled the shelves of the circulating libraries with the motley progeny of their brain. But from the time of the irruption of Southey and his irregulars into the region of Parnassus, where all had been torpor and formality before, with the exception of the little domain of Cowper, poetry rose so rapidly into fashion as to share the patronage of sentimentalists and other idle readers, till the Lady of the Lake and Childe Harold bore away the palm of popularity from the most renowned of their contemporaries — the ladies and gentlemen that live in novels, and no where else. There was indeed a long and desperate resistance made on the part of the novelists against the poets; and their indigenous resources failing, they called in to their aid, not German tales only, but — to confound the enemy with their own weapons — German tragedies and German epics, of such portentous size and character as to excite astonishment, which many of those who felt it mistook for admiration, but which ceased even to be astonishment with the most stupid, when the inebriating effects of the first draught of the Teutonic Helicon had gone off, and left the reader in his right mind. Few of these exotics have been naturalised among us, except the Oberon of Mr. Sotheby, which leaves no room

for regret to those who cannot read the exquisitely fine and fanciful original; and some of the best dramatic works of Schiller and Goethe.

It has been already intimated, that one of the greatest of living poets had embarked his wealthy capital of thought, and inexhaustible stores of memory, into a more profitable channel of literary commerce. I alluded to Sir Walter Scott as the author of "the Waverley Novels," as they are now significantly called, — "the Great Unknown" having disappeared in the person of "the Mighty Minstrel of the North," as the worthy baronet had been previously called in his character of poet. These, as the productions of one mind, exuberant beyond example in this cold climate, are undoubtedly the most extraordinary works of the age; and it might perhaps be added, the most faulty that in any age have exercised despotic dominion over readers of every kind, in such various ways, and for so long a time. A higher tribute cannot be paid to the sovereignty of genius, than is implied in this censure; for what must that excellence be which can afford such a foil, or endure such a drawback! It is no small merit in these to have so quickened the cloyed appetites of circulating-library readers for purer entertainment, that the dulness, froth, and sentimentality which were previously the staple ware of Leadenhall Street, and other wholesale manufactories of novels for the spring and fall fashions, are no longer tolerable, and fictions of far nobler and more intellectual character are substituted, though, of course, the mass is not wholly purified, and the million are the vulgar still.

The principal literary objections to these inimitable tales (for I meddle not with their morality) in after-times will be, that the author, in his best performances, has blended fact and fiction both in incidents and characters so frequently, and made his pictures at once so natural to the life, yet often so contrary to historical verity, that henceforward it will be difficult to distinguish the imaginary from the real with regard to one or the other; thus the credulity of ages to come will be abused in the estimate of men, and the identity of events by the glowing illusion of his pages, in which the details are so minute and exquisite, that the truth of painting will win the author credit for truth of every other kind, and most, it may be, where he least deserves it.

### *The Periodical Press.*

But it is in the issues from the periodical press that the chief influence of literature in the present day consists. Newspapers alone, if no other evidence were to be adduced, would prove incontrovertibly the immense and hitherto unappreciated superiority in point of mental culture, of the existing generation over all their forefathers, since Britain was invaded by Julius Cæsar. The talents, learning, ingenuity, and eloquence employed in the conduct of many of these; the variety of information conveyed through their columns from every quarter of the globe to the obscurest cottage, and into the humblest mind in the realm, render newspapers, not luxuries, which they

might be expected to be among an indolent and voluptuous people, but absolute necessaries of life — the daily food of millions of the most active, intelligent labourers, the most shrewd, indefatigable, and enterprising tribes on the face of the earth. Compare an ordinary provincial journal of last week, with the best that was published in the metropolis fifty years ago, and the step which refinement has made in the interval will at once appear. The periodical publications of the first half of the last century, — the Tatler, Spectator, Guardian, and their successors, did much towards increasing an eager relish for elegant literature, as well as rendering the more useful and popular kinds of knowledge accessible to every body. But, except in their masterpieces, which may be equalled, though never excelled, there are hundreds of articles in every week's newspapers, which may at least rival the common run of essays in some of the most celebrated works above alluded to. The Literary Gazette, the Spectator, and several other weekly journals, are decidedly literary, and exercise no slight jurisdiction in affairs of criticism and taste.

Of higher rank, though far inferior potency, are Magazines. A few of these, indeed, have considerable sale; but they rather reflect the image of the public mind, than contribute towards forming its features or giving it expression. As amusing miscellanies, they are in general far superior to their predecessors, before the establishment of that which bears the title of Monthly, — and which, whatever may have been its merits or delinquencies in past

times, had the honour of effecting as glorious a revolution among the compilers of these, as Southey and Wordsworth effected among the rhymers of 1796. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, at this time, probably takes the lead among the fraternity, and by the boldness, hilarity, and address with which it is managed, it has become equally formidable in politics and predominant in literature. In both these departments, the New Monthly and the London assume a high station. *

Yet there are no publications whatever, which at once exemplify the advancement and the perversion of mind at this particular time, by such decided symptoms of both, as the magazines already named, which are at the head of their class. In the leading articles of these, there is scarcely a line of natural writing from month-end to month-end. Let this sweeping censure be admitted with what qualification it may, the general truth of the assertion may be established by an appeal to any page of any one of them opened at random. That admirable talents are in full exercise there, will be instantly acknowledged; but then all is effort, and splendour, and display. It is fine acting, which only falls short of nature; but it is not nature, and therefore cannot quite please, even at its best: we feel there is something wrong; we may not know exactly what it is, but this we do know, that all is not right. The con-

* And, since this Essay was composed, the Metropolitan, Frazer's Magazine, and others.

tributions are got up in a masterly manner, but evidently for the purpose of producing the greatest possible effect; they are positive experiments upon the minds of the readers — not the unburdening of the minds of the writers themselves, glad to pour out in words the fulness of feelings long cherished in secret, and which they would have uttered in a desert island, where rocks, and woods, and streams were their only auditors. Authors write best for the public when they write for themselves. *

Reviews not only rank higher than magazines in literature — rather by usurpation than right — but they rival newspapers themselves in political influence, while they hold divided empire with the weightier classes of literature — books of every size, and kind, and character, on which moreover they exercise an authority peculiar to the present age, and never dreamed of by critics in any past period since the alphabet was invented. Formerly reviews were, on the whole, what they professed to be — critical essays on new publications; and they filled a respectable office in the republic of letters, as censors who did their duty, not always with ability, but generally with fairness; or, if otherwise, with a decent gravity

* It is but justice to say, that since this paper was originally composed, (in 1823), considerable improvement has been introduced in the style of many magazine articles, but still sufficient of the prodigality of genius (as well as the extravagance of bad taste) is exhibited monthly in such publications to justify the retention of the passage as it originally stood, with that abatement of its severity which this note implies.

of injustice that seldom exposed them to retaliation. The commencement of the Edinburgh Review was the discovery of a new world in criticism, to which all authors were liable to be transported as criminals, and there dealt with according to laws made on the spot, and executed by those who made them. The speculation answered well, the adventurers grew rich and renowned, and their ambition increased with their wealth and celebrity.

Another work, the Quarterly Review, on the same scale, in the course of a few years was started in opposition to it; and this has flourished not less than its prototype, by adopting nearly the same system of tactics in literature, while it has been inveterately confronted to it in politics.

The Westminster Review and the British Critic, in their respective departments, exercise no small influence over respectable classes of readers.

In these nondescript publications downright authorship and critical commentary are combined; the latter being often subsidiary to the former, and a nominal review being an original essay on the subject, of which the work placed at the head of the article sometimes furnishes little more than the title. These distinguished periodicals, on the ground of their decided superiority to all contemporary journals in which the same subjects are discussed, have long commanded the admiration both of friends and foes; and it is a proud proof of the ascendancy of literature in our own day, that these several reviews are the most powerful political auxiliaries, or rather engines of the several parties, which, in such a state

as ours, divide public opinion between them on questions of national interest. It may be added that there are other respectable publications, bearing the name also of reviews, especially the Monthly and the Eclectic, which are conducted with various degrees of ability, but all employing more or less the same arts of criticism, and making criticism subservient to purposes foreign to itself, though captivating to the world of idle and capricious, as well as curious and intelligent, readers. By these, as well as by the magazines and newspapers, such variety and abundance of extracts from new books are regularly copied into their own pages, as almost to supersede the use of the originals; whatever is most valuable in each being thus gratuitously furnished to the public. To authors of high powers this practice is eminently serviceable, as by these means they are earlier and more advantageously introduced to favour and fame than they could otherwise have been by all the arts of puffing and the expense of advertising.

On the whole, therefore, periodical publications of every order may be regarded as propitious in their influence to the circulation of knowledge and the interests of literature; while truth, however perverted in some instances by passion and prejudice, is more rapidly, effectually, and universally diffused by the ever varying and everlasting conflicts maintained in these, than the same quantity with the same force of evidence could be developed in bulkier volumes, by a slower process, and within an incomparably more contracted circle. Works, however, of the

largest kind, and the most elaborate structure, in every department of learning, abound among us; Cyclopedias without measure, compilations without number, besides original treatises, which equally show the industry, talent, and acquirements of authors in all ranks of society, and of every gradation of intellect. Nor are there wanting works of history, voyages and travels, divinity, law, and physic, of sterling value, and worthy of the British nation, which in arts and arms is second to none in the world. The majority of these publications exhibit the same characteristic features as the more fashionable and fugitive ones previously delineated; namely, strong excitement in profession, ambitious display in execution, and excessive gratification in the entertainment which they provide. The books of every era must resemble those who wrote, and those who read them. Great expectation must be met with proportionate effect; and, (unreasonable as it may appear, and as it is,) if the effect be not beyond both, a degree of disappointment is experienced on the one hand, and a measure of failure on the other.

Such, according to the best judgment of the writer of these imperfect remarks, is the present state of literature in this country, especially of popular literature, including poetry, the drama, works of imagination, and the periodical press. Of its future progress or decline it is unnecessary to offer any conjecture. It does, however, seem to have approached a crisis, when some considerable change

for the better or the worse may be anticipated; when literature in England will return to the love of nature and simplicity, or degenerate into bombast and frivolity.

THE END.

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